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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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Priyank's aide, 4 others held for contractor's suicide

BIDAR, 10 JAN

Raju Kapanur, the prime suspect in contractor Sachin Panchal suicide case, has been apprehended along with four others. The arrests took place after CID officials issued notices for the five accused to attend a hearing regarding the investigation. The other individuals arrested include Goraknath, Nandakumar Nagabhujange, Raman Gowda Patil, and Satish. Panchal died by suicde on 26 December. In a suicide note he blamed Minister Priyank Kharge's aide Raju. Bharatiya Janata Party has been demanding the resignation of Mr. Kharge and that the probe must include him. *—Salar News*

SKM to hold statewide protest on 13 Jan

MYSURU, 10 JAN

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) South Indian States, announced on Friday that farmers across States will protest by burning effigies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Agriculture Minister on 13 January at taluk centres. The protest is in response to the Centre's alleged negligence toward Punjab farmer leader Farmer leader Jagjit Sigh Dallewal, who has been on an indefinite hunger strike for 46 days at the Shambu border near Delhi.Kurubur Shanthakumar, Convener, Shanthakumar urged the government to intervene and hold talks with Dallewal to save him. *—Salar News*

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HMPV confirmed in 8-year-old; cases rise to 3 in Gujarat

HIMMATNAGAR, 10 JAN

An eight-year-old boy from Gujarat's Sabarkantha district has been confirmed to have contracted human metapneumovirus (HMPV), marking the third recorded case of this viral infection in the state. The boy, who hails from a family of farm labourers in Prantij taluka, tested positive following analysis at a private laboratory; health officials subsequently sent his blood samples to a government lab for verification. The District Collector of Sabarkantha, Ratankanvar Gadhavicharan, confirmed on Friday that the government lab had validated the HMPV infection. The child is currently receiving treatment in a private hospital in Himmatnagar. *—PTI*

Kejriwal pledges funds for RWAs if re-elected in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal has promised that if his party is re-elected in Delhi, Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) will be allocated funds to hire private security guards for neighbourhood safety. At a press conference on Friday, Kejriwal stated that specific guidelines regarding the funding and the number of guards would be established later. Kejriwal criticised the BJP-led central government for not effectively tackling the rising crime rates in the capital, pointing to increased incidents of theft, robberies, and gang violence. "Their failure to maintain safety has kept them out of power for 27 years," he remarked. *—PTI*

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Sambhal mosque: SC asks govt, ASI not to take action

Mosque panel claims that govt revived 32 temples recently

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

The Supreme Court of India has directed Uttar Pradesh authorities, along with the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), not to take any action regarding a "private well" adjacent to the Mughal-era Jama Masjid mosque in Sambhal. The decision follows a plea from the mosque's management committee.

A bench led by Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna issued notices to the Centre, the ASI's director general, the Sambhal district magistrate, and private individuals associated with the Hindu community, represented by Hari Shankar Jain. The court has scheduled a return date for the notices on 21 February and required a status report from respondents within two weeks. Crucially, the bench has ordered that no action shall be taken in relation to the well pending further review.

The mosque committee claims that the Sambhal district administration has initiated efforts to revive old temples and wells in the area. Reports indicate that 32 temples have been revived, with 19 wells earmarked for public use, including a well that sits at the mosque's entrance. Concerns were raised about the potential for unrest, with the court being informed that previous surveys had already resulted in violence and loss of life.

Senior advocate Huzefa Ahmadi, representing the mosque committee, stressed the well's historical importance and denounced plans associated with it being referred to as "Hari Mandir." The court has been clear that no religious activities shall proceed without its permission committee earlier challenged a November 2024 order from a Sambhal civil judge that permitted a survey of the mosque, asserting that it had not been given adequate opportunity to respond. The Supreme Court had previously intervened after riots erupted near the mosque in late November, resulting in fatalities and injuries. *—PTI*

Supreme Court had previously intervened after riots erupted near the mosque in late November, resulting in fatalities and injuries **PHOTO: PTI**

SC allows JEE dropouts to register

Supreme Court on Friday allowed petitioners, who dropped out from their courses between 5 and 18 November, 2024, to register for Joint Entrance Examination (JEE)-Advanced. A bench of Justices BR Gavai and Augustine George Masih passed the order while hearing the pleas against bringing down from three to two the attempts given to JEE-Advanced aspirants.

AFTER 4-DAY PROTEST

Thousands of ASHA workers had been on an indefinite strike at Bengaluru's Freedom Park for four days **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Asha workers to get Rs 10,000 monthly honorarium

BENGALURU, 10 JAN

- The breakthrough came when CM Siddaramaiah assured ASHA workers that their demands would be reviewed and acted upon.

The protest by ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) workers in Bengaluru came to an end on Friday after the Karnataka government conceded to their demands for improved compensation and benefits.

The State announced that the government would provide ASHA workers with a fixed monthly honorarium of Rs 10,000.

In addition to the honorarium increase, the government has also pledged to address other key demands, including guaranteed incentives for additional tasks and a provision for three-month paid leave for ASHA workers in the event of serious illness.

Thousands of ASHA workers had been on an indefinite strike at Bengaluru's Freedom Park for four days, demanding better pay and incentives, which had been promised but not delivered despite intervention from state officials. On Wednesday, Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao had visited the protesting workers and promised an increase in their honorarium to Rs 9,500, up from the current Rs 8,000. However, the workers remained firm in their demand for a more substantial hike.

The breakthrough came when Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah assured a delegation of ASHA workers that their demands would be reviewed and acted upon expeditiously. The CM also promised to invite the ASHA Union to discuss further increments during the upcoming state budget session in March.

The announcement was made during a meeting at the Chief Minister's residence, Krishna, in the presence of Rao. *—Salar News*

Online gaming: SC stays ₹ 1L cr GST notices

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

The Supreme Court of India has issued a stay on showcause notices totalling over Rs 1 lakh crore, which were issued by GST authorities to online gaming companies and casinos for alleged tax evasion. A bench comprising Justices J B Pardiwala and R Mahadevan stated that the matters warranted a full hearing, and all proceedings against the gaming companies will remain paused until further notice.

Additional Solicitor General N Venkataraman, representing the GST department, informed the court that some of the showcause notices may expire in February 2024. The case has been scheduled for hearing on 18 March.

In October 2023, GST authorities initiated these proceedings after the government amended the GST law, mandating that overseas online gaming companies register in India effective from 1 October 2023.

Furthermore, in August 2023, the GST Council clarified that a 28 per cent GST would be applied to the total amount of bets placed on online gaming platforms.

Several gaming companies, including Games 24x7 and the Federation of Indian Fantasy Sports, have challenged the GST demands in various high courts. The Supreme Court had previously transferred multiple petitions from nine high courts to itself for an authoritative ruling on the imposition of the 28 per cent GST on e-gaming firms. Additionally, the apex court stayed a Karnataka High Court ruling that had quashed a Rs 21,000 crore GST notice against an online gaming entity. *—PTI*

Hush money case: No jail or fine for Trump

NEW YORK, 10 JAN

US President-elect Donald Trump was sentenced on Friday in his hush money case, but the judge declined to impose any punishment. Judge Juan M Merchan indicated he plans a no-penalty sentence called an unconditional discharge. That would mean no jail time, no probation and no fines, but nothing is final until the proceeding is done.

Trump's sentence caps a norm-smashing case that saw him charged with 34 felonies, put on trial for two months and convicted on every count. Yet, the legal detour didn't hurt him with voters.

The hush money case accused Trump of fudging his business' records to veil a USD 130,000 payoff to porn actor Stormy Daniels. She was paid, late in Trump's 2016 campaign, not to tell the public about a sexual encounter she maintains the two had a decade earlier. He says nothing sexual happened between them, and that his political adversaries spun up a bogus prosecution.

Manhattan Judge Merchan could have sentenced the 78-year-old Republican to up to four years in prison. Instead, he chose a sentence that sidestepped thorny constitutional issues by ending the case but assured that Trump will become the first person convicted of a felony to assume the presidency. Trump, briefly addressing the court as he appeared virtually from his Florida home, said his criminal trial and conviction has "been a very terrible experience" and insisted he committed no crime. Trump appeared on a video feed 10 days before he is inaugurated, again pilloried the case, the only one of his four criminal indictments that has gone to trial and possibly the only one that ever will. *—PTI*

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K'taka's Arya enters Canada PM race

OTTAWA, 10 JAN

Chandra Arya, an Indian-origin Member of Parliament from Nepean, Ontario, has declared his candidacy for the leadership of the Liberal Party of Canada, which is set to choose a new leader on 9 March. This announcement follows Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's decision to step down while remaining in office until the new leader is elected.

Arya, originally from Tumakuru, Karnataka, took to X to outline his vision for Canada, asserting the need for a smaller, more efficient government to address significant structural challenges facing the nation. "We must make bold decisions that are absolutely necessary for the sake of our children and grandchildren," he stated in his announcement.

His proposals include increasing the retirement age by two years by 2040, introducing a citizenship-based tax system, and formally recognising Palestine as a state. Moreover, Arya has expressed a desire for Canada to transition to a sovereign republic, moving away from its ties to the monarchy. The Liberal Party confirmed that Arya's announcement coincides with discussions among potential candidates, including former central banker Mark Carney and ex-finance minister Chrystia Freeland. *—PTI*

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'Will dent those saying Kumbh held on Waqf land'

MAHAKUMBH NAGAR, 10 JAN

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath issued a stern warning to the Waqf board, stating that those coming to the Prayagraj Maha Kumbh with intentions of claiming land would face "denting-painting,".

In an interview with Aaj Tak, he stated that controversial religious structures should not be referred to as mosques, asserting that Islamic principles oppose the construction of such sites at disputed locations.

The Chief Minister's remark came days after a Muslim cleric claimed that the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj was being held on Waqf land.

He noted that unlike Sanatan Dharma, which centres on temple construction, Islam does not necessitate specific structures for worship.

"Wherever the word 'waqf appears, it will be investigated to see in whose name the land was originally registered, and efforts will be made to return it to its rightful owners," Adityanath said. *—Agencies*

CM DISMISSES RENAMING OF KRS ROAD AFTER HIM

MYSURU, 10 JAN

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has clarified that he does not see the need to rename a stretch of the KRS Road as "Siddaramaiah Arogya Marga," given that it is already named after Princess. Responding to a reporter's question during a private visit to Mysuru Airport, he expressed limited knowledge about the matter.

The proposal to rename the historic KRS Road has sparked significant controversy after the Mysuru City Corporation issued a public notice on 13 December, inviting citizens to submit their opinions within 30 days. Several universities have approached Siddaramaiah with offers of honorary doctorates, but he has consistently declined, asserting that he does not consider himself deserving of such accolades.

The renaming proposal has drawn sharp criticism from the Oppsotion BJP and JD(S). *—Salar News*

10,000 STRUCTURES BURNT

US National Guard called in as fresh blaze burns Los Angeles

LOS ANGELES, 10 JAN

This week's twin wildfires have devastated the Los Angeles area, destroying at least 10,000 homes, businesses, and other structures, officials reported on Thursday. As new fires ignite and spread, authorities are urging residents to heed evacuation orders.

California's National Guard has been deployed to assist in managing the crisis.

The fast-moving Kenneth Fire began on Tuesday in the San Fernando Valley, drawing attention just as firefighters made progress against existing blazes. Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass warned of expected high winds that could exacerbate the situation. The Eaton Fire, near Pasadena, has already damaged over 5,000 structures and is part of a larger pattern of destruction affecting a 25-mile stretch north of downtown.

The flames have obliterated significant landmarks, including churches, schools, and local businesses. AccuWeather has raised damage estimates to between USD 135 billion and 150 billion. Despite efforts to contain the Eaton and Palisades fires, both remain at 0 per cent containment. Tragically, seven people have lost their lives, with search crews scouring the rubble for additional victims. Evacuation orders are in place for over 180,000 residents, as smoke and ash cloak the region. All schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District will close on Friday due to hazardous air quality.

High-profile figures, including actors Billy Crystal and Mandy Moore, have also lost their homes. In response to the crisis, Jamie Lee Curtis has pledged USD 1 million for a relief fund aimed at supporting those affected.

As the unprecedented wildfire season persists, residents face an uncertain recovery amidst profound loss. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 5 & 6

The fast-moving Kenneth Fire began on Tuesday **PHOTO: X**

Be CM after next polls: Rajanna to DKS

'Rather than eyeing for just 2.5 years, Shivakumar should become CM for full five years'

BENGALURU, 10 JAN

Minister for Cooperation KN Rajanna on Friday suggested that Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar should become chief minister for the full five years after winning the next Assembly polls under his leadership, rather than eyeing the post for the remaining two-and-half years of the current government's tenure.

Rajanna made the comments after Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's recently held a dinner for select Dalit and ST Cabinet colleagues. The event had triggered speculations within the party about a possible change of guard in the state after March, under a "rotational chief minister" or "power-sharing" formula.

Rajanna, who is considered to be close to Siddaramaiah, was also part of the dinner meeting.

On his part, Shivakumar has made no secret of his ambition to become the CM.

"As a human being, the desire for power is natural. I don't feel Shivakumar showing interest or desire for the chief minister post is wrong. The previous (2023) election fought was under the leadership of Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar, and people blessed us (Congress)," Rajanna said.

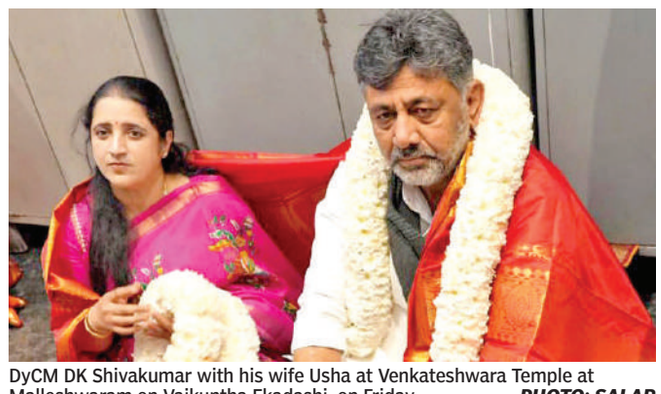
"Let's face the next Assembly polls under Shivakumar's leadership. When the party comes to power under his leadership, let him be the chief minister for the full five years. Why fight for two-and-half years now?" Rajanna said.

Asked if he will be a minister in Shivakumar's Cabinet if there is a chance, Rajanna said he does not intent to contest anymore elections.

There was stiff competition between Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar for the CM's post after the declaration of election results in May 2023, and the Congress managed to convince the latter to be content with the position of deputy chief minister.

There were rumours then that a compromise had been reached between the two on a "rotational chief minister formula," according to which DKS will become the CM after two-and-half years.

—PTI



DyCM DK Shivakumar with his wife Usha at Venkateshwara Temple at Malleshwaram on Vaikuntha Ekadashi, on Friday **PHOTO: SALAR**

Real estate man fired at by bike-borne people

BELAGAVI, 10 JAN

Two unidentified people on a two-wheeler fired two rounds at a real estate businessman on the outskirts of Belagavi on Friday early morning.

The incident occurred in Hindu nagar in Ganeshpur locality. Praful Balakrishna Patil, 30, was returning to Belagavi from Belagundi village in a car when he was shot from short range through the driver-side window. The window was closed when the shots were fired. Patil sustained injuries on his face from shards of glass. He was admitted to a private hospital. Police suspected the role of his business rivals in the attack. Patil is also said to have a history of crime. Belagavi police commissioner Ada Marteen said Patil himself went to the hospital after the attack.

—Salar News

5 detained for auto driver's murder in Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 10 JAN

The KP Agrahara police have apprehended five individuals following the murder of an auto-rickshaw driver, whose bludgeoned body was discovered on the night of 31 December. The victim, identified as Kushal, was found within the precincts of the KP Agrahara police station, prompting immediate investigative measures. Police scrutinised CCTV footage from the area and dispatched alerts citywide, leading to the swift arrest of the suspects—Sagar, Dilip, Gangadhar, Vijay, and Madesh—who had fled the scene. Investigations revealed that Kushal and the accused were drinking together to celebrate New Year's Eve. A quarrel arose when they seized a beer bottle from him, escalating to violence, fatal injuries, and ultimately, Kushal's death. The assailants fled, but their capture followed quickly thereafter.

—Salar News

Two Ayyappa devotees killed in road mishap in TN

MYSURU, 10 JAN

Two Ayyappa devotees tragically lost their lives in a road accident on the Sirumugai-Mettupalayam road in Coimbatore district during the early hours of Friday. The victims, identified as Nagaraju (65) and Venkatadri (55), both from Kollegal in Chamarajanagar district, were travelling in an overspeeding car that collided with a tamarind tree. Three other passengers, Swamy, Mahesh, and Kumar, also from Kollegal, sustained injuries and were rushed to Mettupalayam Government General Hospital. Authorities have conducted post-mortems on the deceased, and their bodies have been handed over to the families. The Sirumugai Police have registered a case and are investigating the incident, according to police sources.

—Salar News

Gear up for polls: Vijayendra

BENGALURU, 10 JAN

Karnataka BJP President BY Vijayendra convened a meeting with former legislators and defeated candidates on Friday to strengthen the party at the grassroots level and prepare for the forthcoming panchayat elections.

Vijayendra reaffirmed his commitment to uniting the party while attempting to mitigate concerns regarding intra-party factionalism and opposition from certain leaders. He launched a critique of the ruling Congress government, highlighting the "power politics" between Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy CM DK Shiva Kumar, and alleging "zero development" under their administration.

BY Vijayendra **PHOTO: X**

Key figures in attendance included BJP veteran BS Yediyurappa, Leader of Opposition in the Assembly R Ashoka, and Chalavadi Narayanaswamy of the Legislative Council. Post-meeting, Vijayendra stated, "Our focus is on further strengthening the party by engaging all communities and preparing for the upcoming zilla and taluk panchayat polls."

Despite the presence of dissenting voices within the party, led by MLAs Basanagouda Patil Yatnal and Ramesh Jarkiholi, Vijayendra maintained that the meeting was aimed solely at unifying efforts to fortify the BJP, denying any agenda against specific individuals.

He further accused the Congress government of leading the state into turmoil through its guarantee schemes.

—PTI

CLP to discuss MLAs' works

BENGALURU, 10 JAN

Home Minister G Parameshwara on Friday said the Congress Legislature Party (CLP) meeting scheduled next week may discuss development works at MLA constituencies and the Socio-Economic and Education Survey report, popularly known as the "caste census".

The CLP meeting scheduled for 13 December evokes curiosity in the wake of the alleged "dinner politics" in the state unit of the party.

"I think there will be discussions regarding development works in the constituencies of MLAs, because the budget session is coming up. MLAs may share the works that need to be implemented and the allocation of funds for it. The CM will consider all those things while preparing the budget," Parameshwara said.

G Parameshwara **PHOTO: PTI**

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, who also holds the finance portfolio, is expected to table the State Budget in March.

Asked if the CLP meet would discuss caste census, Parameshwara said, "It may also be discussed, because major policy decisions are discussed at the legislature party meetings. I think, this may also be brought up for discussion."

Siddaramaiah and Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil have said that the caste census is likely to be placed before the Cabinet at its next meeting scheduled for 16 January. The Vokkaliag and Lingayat communities have termed a survey done as "unscientific" and demanded a fresh survey.

—PTI

UNFLINCHING EYES

A girl checks out a gun used by defence personnel at Manekshaw Parade Grounds in Bengaluru on Friday. 'Know Your Army Mela', an exhibition for the public, will be held on Saturday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

BREAK BARRIERS IN HEALTHCARE ACCESS: EX-CJI

MYSURU, 10 JAN

Former chief justice of India Justice Dhananjaya Y Chandrachud on Friday highlighted the need to make healthcare facilities inclusive and accessible to all people, irrespective of their economic, social and cultural background, to build a progressive and prosperous human society.

Speaking at the 15th convocation of the JSS Academy of Higher Education and Research at its Shivarathreeshwaranagar campus, Justice Chandrachud urged all young medical professionals to focus on the protection of health and wellbeing of all individuals, besides ensuring equity and equality in healthcare for all citizens of the nation. He said the main purpose of educational institutions is to serve the humanity.

—Salar News

City to get 1st disease research unit in South

BENGALURU, 10 JAN

Minister for Medical Education Sharan Prakash Patil on Friday said Bengaluru will get South India's first infectious disease research and diagnostic laboratory.

According to him, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has chosen Bangalore Medical College & Research Institute (BMC&RI) as its first centre to establish Infectious Disease Research and Diagnostic Laboratories (IRDLs).

Patil said the BMC&RI's credibility and service to all sections of society in the state made the ICMR choose it to set up the centre. Now that the research on infectious diseases will take place in Bengaluru, there will be no need to send samples to other states for confirmation, he said.

Sharan Prakash Patil **PHOTO: X/S_PRAKASHPATIL**

The Centre is establishing IRDLs in medical colleges across states, with a focus on virology research and diagnostic laboratories related to bacteriology, mycology, and parasitology, stated the release.

The minister also inaugurated Moniz cath lab suite, a state-of-the-art DSA Cath Lab at the Trauma & Emergency Care Centre in Victoria Hospital on Thursday. The cath lab has a ward with eight beds in addition to pre-cath and post-cath wards.

—PTI

City pays tribute to Muzaffar Assadi

BENGALURU, 10 JAN

An event titled 'In Loving Memory of Muzaffar H Assadi' was held in the City on Friday to honour the life and legacy of the writer, scholar and thinker. Journalists, professors and individuals from diverse backgrounds gathered to reflect on Assadi's immense contributions to society.

Senior journalist Dinesh Amin Mattu highlighted Assadi's broad influence, saying, "Muzaffar Assadi inspired generations of writers and thinkers. He was not just a voice for Muslims but for the oppressed and ignored."

Mattu praised Assadi's courage, recalling how, unlike many in powerful positions, Assadi never shied away from speaking the truth, earning respect for his simplicity and fearlessness.

Professor Assadi, 63, died on 4 January. A distinguished alumnus of Mangalore University and JNU, New Delhi, Assadi was recognized for his political scholarship and analysis.

Hariprasad, Editor of News18, praised Assadi's versatility, describing him as a "resourceful person for media, universities, and research institutions." He added, "His knowledge and writings had the power to influence systemic change."

Professor Shakira Khanum of Al Ameen Degree College, Bengaluru, expressed regret that Assadi, despite being the top choice, was denied the post of Vice-Chancellor at Mangalore University.

Vikhar Ahmed Sayeed of Frontline Magazine recalled how he had used Assadi's work in his early journalism career.

—Salar News

TOGETHER IN PRAYER

Devotees at ISKCON temple in Bengaluru offer prayers to Lord Venkateshwara on the auspicious occasion of Vaikuntha Ekadashi on Friday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

BACK TO ROOTS

Suggi Huggi: City's gateway to Sankranti traditions

BENGALURU, 10 JAN

Do you miss flying kites or riding bullock carts? Amid Bengaluru's fast-paced life, the Suggi Huggi festival at Jakkur Ground from 10 to 12 January offers Bengaluru a taste of tradition.

Organised by Karnataka Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda, the vibrant Sankranti celebration is designed to transport the City's residents to a village-like atmosphere and reconnect them with their cultural roots.

The festival is expected to draw thousands of visitors. Last year, approximately 10,000 people attended, and this year, the event has expanded with over 100 stalls showcasing a wide range of cultural attractions. From traditional music and dance performances to unique crafts from across Karnataka, the festival promises to be a sensory delight.

As visitors explore the lively stalls, they encounter artisans from the State and beyond.

Suggi Huggi festival at Jakkur Ground from 10 to 12 January showcases a wide range of cultural attractions **PHOTOS: SALAR**

Latha Mahalakshmi, an employee at Sunshine Academy in Bengaluru, displayed magic books with erasable pages that quickly captured the attention of curious parents. "These magic copybooks help children write, learn, and reuse them," she told Salar News.

For Bengaluru resident Ananya Rao, the festival was a visual feast. "The vibrancy of the stalls, the lively music, and the warmth of the community make this festival a treat for the senses," she said.

The festival also brought in artisans from other states, adding to the event's diversity. Ramesh Rar travelled 2,380 km from Dehradun to present Banjara handicrafts from Uttarakhand, featuring purses made from reused fabric, at the festival.

Similarly, Shabbir, an artisan from Agra, displayed crystal replicas of the Taj Mahal made from single crystals priced at Rs 250, while Ghulam Sarwar from Uttar Pradesh showcased handmade carpets from Bhadohi.

Raman, a Kalaburagi-based artisan, shared his family's legacy of handcrafted artificial jewellery. "We've been in this business for two generations, making these pieces at home," he said.

Similarly, Niveditha from Ramanagara displayed colourful wooden and lacquerware crafts from Channapatna, known as the "town of toys." "Each handcrafted piece is unique," she said.

Among the many entertainers, magician Mohammed Zakir from Dehradun captivated the crowd with his enchanting tricks, leaving both children and adults mesmerized by his sleight of hand.

—Salar News

CRIME BEAT

MAN HELD FOR MOWING DOWN DOG

BENGALURU, 10 JAN

A 35-year-old man was arrested for "intentionally running over" a stray dog with his SUV, police said.

The incident occurred in JP Nagar on 31 December and the video went viral. The accused, Manjunath Venkatesh, is a resident of from Shekhar Layout in JP Nagar 8th phase. Venkatesh was arrested on Thursday evening and released on Friday. He told police that he was rushing for work and did not notice the dog. A case was filed with Talaghattapura Police.

— Salar News

MAN HELD FOR HITTING DEER IN MYSURU

MYSURU, 10 JAN

Gundlupet Police have arrested a man on charges of killing a deer with his speeding car while the animal was crossing the road on National Highway 766 near Kaggaladahundi, which runs through the Bandipur Tiger Reserve in the Maddur range of Gundlupet taluk, on Thursday.

Following a complaint lodged by Gundlupet Range Assistant Forest Officer Suresh, police apprehended Zakir (56) from Wayanad, Kerala. He has since been remanded to judicial custody.

—Salar News

Prez confers Pravasi Samman awards to 27 people

BHUBANESWAR, 10 JAN

Trinidad & Tobago President Christine Carla Kangaloo and 26 others were conferred the prestigious Pravasi Bharatiya Samman award by President Droupadi Murmu on the last day of the 18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) convention here. Murmu congratulated all the awardees and appreciated them for working for the society in different fields. She said that their success stories are not just a matter of pride for India, but they also inspire mil-lions across the world to strive for excellence. Murmu said Kangaloo's outstanding contributions in leading her nation have set a high benchmark on the world stage. *—PTI*

Kerala court halts MLA's arrest in Cong leader's death

WAYANAD, 10 JAN

A Kerala court on Friday told the police not to arrest Congress MLA I C Balakrishnan and Wayanad DCC president N D Appachan, who have been booked for abetment to suicide of the party's Wayanad district office-bearer N M Vijayan and his son, till 15 January. Balakrishnan's advocate told a TV channel that the court orally asked the police not to arrest Balakrishnan till 15 January and called for the case diary. The advocate said the order will also be applicable to Appachan who has also moved a separate plea for anticipatory bail. He also said that Balakrishnan was not in hiding and there was no need for him to go into hiding as he has 24 hours police protection.*—PTI*

Sena leader files plaint over video 'defaming' Aaditya

MUMBAI, 10 JAN

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Vinayak Raut on Friday filed a police complaint alleging that a video of a raid at a dance bar is being falsely linked to party colleague Aaditya Thackeray, an official said. According to the official, the purported video was shot at a dance bar in Mumbai's Andheri area. It shows a few women emerging from a cavity created inside the premises after police action. However, the text superimposed on the visual claims that the place is a "cafe" owned by Thackeray, Raut said in his complaint. Raut told the police that the content was intentionally created and shared on social media to defame Thackeray, a former Maharashtra minister, the official said. The cyber police of the Mumbai crime branch have initiated an inquiry into the video and further action is being taken, the official added. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

ED raids RJD MLA in Bihar co-op bank 'fraud' case

PATNA, 10 JAN

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday conducted searches in multiple states, including in Bihar on premises liked to RJD MLA Alok Kumar Mehta, as part of a money laundering investigation linked to alleged funds embezzlement at a state cooperative bank, official sources said. About 18 premises in Bihar, West Bengal (Kolkata), Uttar Pradesh and Delhi are being searched, they said. These include premises linked to RJD MLA and former Bihar minister Alok Kumar Mehta (58), who is among the promoters of the Bihar-based Vaishali Shahri Vikas (VSV) Cooperative Bank, apart from some other linked entities, the sources said. The money laundering investigation stems from some state police FIRs filed against the bank and its office-bearers for alleged embezzlement of funds worth about Rs 85 crore, they said. *—PTI*

BJP protests Kejri's 'fake' voter list claim

More than 20 protesters were detained for protesting without valid permission

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

Delhi BJP held a protest on Friday against AAP for allegedly making "fake" claims about registration of voters from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in the electoral rolls ahead of Assembly polls.

Hundreds of protesters holding placards like "Purvanchal Virodhi Kejriwal" raised slogans against AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal, with some attempting to breach the security barricades near his residence.

Slogans such as "Litti chokha khayenge, Kejriwal bhagayenge", "Chhathi Maiya ki jai", and "Purvanchal Virodhi Kejriwal murdabad" echoed during the protest.

A protester, speaking to PTI, said, "Purvanchalis have been called fake voters. This anger will not subside until we remove Kejriwal from here."

Another protester added, "He has humiliated us. During Anna Hazare's movement, he used us and made us endure police lathis. And now, he is calling us fake voters."

During the protest, the demonstrators attempted to breach security barricades and move closer to Kejriwal's residence.

However, the police used water cannons to disperse the crowd and prevented them from advancing further.

According to police officials, more than 20 protesters were detained for protesting without valid permission.

Police use water cannons to disperse agitators during BJP's protest against AAP in New Delhi on Friday ***PHOTO: PTI***

BJP MP Manoj Tiwari said, " Kejriwal has always insulted the Purvanchali community. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he made several objectionable statements, and now he has referred to them as 'fake voters'. We will not forget this insult, and neither will the people of Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Bihar. This betrayal will remain etched in the memory of Delhiites as well."

In a formal complaint to the Election Commission, Kejriwal raised concerns over applications for the addition of 13,000 new voters between 15 December and 8 January.

Addressing the media after lodging the complaint, Kejriwal said, "Apparently many of these voters have been brought in from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and other neighbouring states to create fake voter registrations. This manipulation undermines the election process."

Elections for the 70-member Delhi Assembly are scheduled on 5 February. Votes will be counted on 8 February. *—PTI*

BJP WILL PICK RAMESH BIDHURI AS CM CANDIDATE, SAYS ATISHI

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

Delhi Chief Minister Atishi citing "credible" sources claimed on Friday that the BJP has decided to project its leader Ramesh Bidhuri as the party's chief ministerial candidate for the Assembly polls.

She said this was Bidhuri's "reward" for being the "most abusive" leader of his party. "It has been learnt from credible sources that the Gali Galauj Party has decided that the most abusive leader of the party Ramesh Bidhuri will become their chief ministerial candidate," Atishi claimed in a press conference. Atishi is seeking re-election from the Kalkaji seat in the February Assembly polls. *—PTI*

LEFT PARTIES TO CONTEST 6 SEATS IN DELHI POLLS: BRINDA KARAT

RANCHI, 10 JAN

Senior CPI(M) leader Brinda Karat said the Left parties have decided to contest six seats in the Delhi assembly polls, and support the "strongest candidates" fighting against the BJP in other constituencies.

She said the CPI(M) would contest two out of the six seats, and "make all efforts to stop BJP from coming to power" in New Delhi. She was in Ranchi to take part in the eighth Jharkhand State General Conference of Communist Party of India (Marxist). *—PTI*

Meet PM instead of Akal Takht, Dallewal tells BJP

CHANDIGARH, 10 JAN

As his fast-unto-death entered the 46th day, farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal on Friday asked the Punjab BJP to approach Prime Minister Narendra Modi instead of Akal Takht Jathedar if they want him to end his hunger strike.

In a three-minute video message released on Friday, the 70-year-old farmer leader asserted he will end his fast only after the Centre has accepted farmers' demands, which include a legal guarantee for Minimum Support Price for crops.

Dallewal said in his video message, "We have information that the leaders of the Punjab unit of BJP appealed to the Akal Takht to intervene to end Dallewal's fast-unto-death... But the Punjab BJP should approach (PM) Modi ji, Vice President (Jagdeep Dhankhar), Agriculture Minister (Shivraj Singh Chouhan), (Home Minister) Amit Shah ji. Instead of meeting them, they are approaching the Akal Takht Jathedar," he said.

Doctors check on farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who is on a fast unto death over various demands, in Sangrur ***PHOTO: ANI***

Farmer leaders camped at the Punjab-Haryana border also burnt effigies of the central government on Friday.

Dallewal, the convener of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political), is on hunger strike at Khanauri border between Punjab and Haryana since 26 November.

Dallewal has refused to take any medical aid during the prolonged fasting period, causing his health to deteriorate.

Farmers, under the banner of SKM (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, have been camping at the Shambhu and Khanauri border points between Punjab and Haryana since 13 February, after their march to Delhi was halted by security forces. *—PTI*

Onus on Cong to keep INDIA bloc united: Raut

MUMBAI, 10 JAN

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Friday said it was the responsibility of the Congress to keep the INDIA bloc intact as it was the largest party in the opposition alliance.

Raut's statement came in the backdrop of Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah's remarks expressing dismay over the lack of clarity on INDIA bloc leadership and agenda, and saying the alliance should be wound up if it was meant only for the 2024 parliamentary elections.

"If the alliance partners feel the INDIA bloc was only for the Lok Sabha polls and doesn't exist now, the Congress is to be blamed (for this situation). There has been no communication, dialogue (among constituents). We fought the Lok Sabha elections (together) and got good results. There should have been a meeting (of INDIA bloc) to chalk out future plans. It was the Congress' responsibility to take this initiative," he said.

- Sanjay Raut' statement came in the backdrop of Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah's remarks expressing dismay over the lack of clarity on INDIA bloc leadership and agenda

Raut warned if the alliance, which took shape before the 2024 parliamentary polls, breaks, it cannot be revived. "The INDIA bloc was formed for the Lok Sabha polls. But the Congress should take responsibility to keep everyone together. We need to correct past mistakes. Dissolving the opposition grouping will be an extreme step," the Shiv Sena (UBT) leader said. *—PTI*

PAWAR LAUDS RSS COMMITMENT TO IDEOLOGY

MUMBAI, 10 JAN

NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar has praised the RSS for dedication to its ideology and urged his party to create a worker base with commitment to progressive thoughts of Shahu Maharaj, Mahatma Phule, BR Ambedkar and political stalwart Yeshwantrao Chavan.

Addressing party workers at a meeting in south Mumbai on Thursday, the former Union minister noted the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has committed cadres who show unwavering loyalty to the Hindutva organisation's ideology and do not deviate from their path at any cost.

Reflecting on the Nationalist Congress Party (SP)'s severe drubbing in the November Assembly polls, he said, "We became complacent after the Lok Sabha election success, while the ruling alliance (BJP-led Mahayuti) took immediate steps to contain its reverses in the parliamentary polls." *—PTI*

Rahul gets bail in Savarkar defamation case

PUNE, 10 JAN

A special court in Pune on Friday granted bail to Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in a defamation case related to his alleged objectionable remarks on Hindutva ideologue VD Savarkar.

The MP/MLA court granted bail on a surety bond of Rs 25,000 after he appeared before it through video conferencing, his lawyer said.

Senior Congress leader Mohan Joshi stood as surety for Gandhi (54) before the court presided over by Amol Shinde, judicial magistrate (first class) and special judge for MP/MLA cases. The case was filed on a complaint by Savarkar's grandnephew Satyaki, who alleged Gandhi had made defamatory remarks in London in March 2023.

PHOTO: ANI

Earlier, advocate representing Satyaki, objected to Gandhi's application seeking virtual appearance.

The matter will be next heard on 18 February.

As per the complaint, Gandhi, while speaking at the London event, stated that Savarkar had written in a book that he and five to six of his friends once beat up a Muslim man and he (Savarkar) felt happy.

According to the complaint, the freedom fighter had not written this anywhere and the Congress leader's remarks were aimed at defaming him. At the time, the court had asked the Pune police to investigate the allegations and file a report. The Vishrambaug police, after an inquiry, submitted that there was prima facie truth in the complaint.

Gandhi had skipped the previous court appearance on 2 December citing the winter session of Parliament which he was attending. His lawyer Pawar had then assured that the opposition parliamentarian will appear in the court on 10 January. *—PTI*

Prashant Kishore's Jan Suraaj Party moves HC to cancel BPSC exams

PATNA, 10 JAN

Amid Prashant Kishor's fast unto death over alleged irregularities in the Bihar PSC exams, his Jan Suraaj Party (JSP) has moved the Patna High Court, seeking cancellation of the Combined Competitive Exams held on 13 December, his counsel said on Friday.

Advocate Pranav Kumar said, "The case was mentioned today before the single-judge bench of Justice Arvind Singh Chandel. The matter has been posted for hearing on 15 January.

Kumar claimed that "such irregularities" were reported from many examination centres and not just Bapu Pariksha Parisar where many candidates had boycotted the tests, alleging that the question paper had been leaked.

Notably, about five lakh candidates had appeared at more than 900 centres across the state for the exams. *—PTI*

'GODHRA RIOTS PAINED ME'

I'm only human, not God: PM in podcast debut with Nikhil

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, making his podcast debut on Zerodha co-founder Nikhil Kamath's People by WTF series, said that mistakes happen and he too is susceptible to making them.

He said, "When I became (Gujarat) chief minister I said I will not spare any effort to work hard. I will not do anything for myself. And, thirdly, I am human and I can make mistakes. But I will not do anything wrong out of bad intentions. I have made it a mantra of my life. Mistakes are inevitable. I must have made mistakes. I am a human too, not a god."

Talking about the 2002 Godhra riots he said, "On 24 February, 2002, I became MLA for the first time, and on 27 February, I went to the Assembly. I was a three-day-old MLA when such an incident happened in Godhra. We first received reports of fire in a train, then gradually we received reports of casualties. I was in the House, and I was concerned. As soon as I came out, I said I wanted to visit Godhra... There was only one helicopter...I guess it was ONGC's, but they said that since it is a single-engine chopper, they cannot allow a VIP on it. We argued, and I said that I would be responsible for whatever happened," PM Modi said.

"I reached Godhra, and I witnessed that painful scene, those dead bodies... I felt everything, but I knew that I was sitting in a position where I would have to stay out of my emotions and natural tendencies. I did whatever I could to control myself," he told Kamath. He said he is willing to discard old ideas and embrace new ones as long as they fit into his essential ideology of "nation first".

Asked if he sees such potential in any young politician, Modi said they are many of them.

"They toil, they work with a mission. If I say a name, it will be injustice to many others. There are a lot of names and faces in front of me. I know details of a lot of people but it is my responsibility to not do injustice to others," he added. Asserting that he has never confined himself to a comfort zone, Modi said his risk-taking ability has hardly been utilised

On the reservation of one-third seats for women in state Assemblies and the Lok Sabha, he mentioned that women are already represented in local bodies due to 50 per cent reservation in many states. He urged them to strive for capability and preparedness to take on roles in assemblies and Parliament. *—PTI*

> **This from a man who proclaimed his non-biological status just eight months back. This is clearly damage control**
>
> -Jairam Ramesh, Congress leader

Zerodha co-founder Nikhil Kamath with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi on Friday ***PHOTO: PTI***

PHOTO: ANI

Class 12 student held for bomb scare in Delhi schools

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

Delhi Police has detained a Class 12 student for allegedly sending bomb threats to more than 23 schools in the national capital over the past few weeks as he did not want to write his exams, sources said on Friday. The latest in the series was on Thursday when around 10 educational institutes received bomb threats. The sources said the south district police apprehended the Class 12 student, a minor, on Thursday evening in connection with the threats. The sources said the accused had sent bomb threats to 23 different schools as he did not want to take school examinations. He used this method to trigger panic. *—PTI*

AMU receives bomb threat, security tightened

ALIGARH, 10 JAN

Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) received a threat email "to blow up the campus", following which the security arrangements have been intensified, police said on Friday. Superintendent of Police (City) Mrigank Shekhar Pathak said inspection of all sensitive areas in and around the campus began since Thursday evening, when all top varsity officials, including the vice-chancellor, received the email. The authorities are "not taking any chances" on this threat, Pathak said. AMU spokesperson Asim Siddiqui said the email letter also mentions ransom. "The university authorities reported this matter to the police, who have also activated the Cyber Crime Cell to trace the origins of the source mail ID," he added. The police have been pressed into service dog squads at key points inside the campus. *—PTI*

'Maa Ki Rasoi' at Maha Kumbh offers Rs 9 meals

MAHAKUMBH NAGAR, 10 JAN

Ahead of the beginning of the Maha Kumbh, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday inaugurated 'Maa Ki Rasoi,' a community kitchen initiative, offering a full meal for just Rs 9. The community kitchen is operated by the Nandi Sewa Sansthan at Swaroop Rani Nehru Hospital and for people from the economically weaker section, the Uttar Pradesh government said in a statement. "The meal includes dal, four rotis, vegetables, rice, salad, and a dessert," the government said. According to the Nandi Sewa Sansthan, 'Maa Ki Rasoi' will prove useful for those who come to SRN Hospital for the treatment. Maa Ki Rasoi, a fully AC, hygienic and modern restaurant, is made in an area of about 2,000 square feet. *—PTI*

Dense fog envelops Delhi, over 100 flights delayed

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

A thick blanket of dense fog enveloped Delhi Friday morning, reducing visibility to zero which impacted air and train operations, according to officials. They said over 100 flights were delayed at the Indira Gandhi International Airport and 26 trains were running late. At Safdarjung, visibility remains limited to a minimum of 50m in dense fog since 5.30am, the IMD added. Meanwhile, Delhi recorded a minimum temperature of 6 degrees Celsius, 0.9 notches below normal, while the air quality was recorded in the severe category. According to the CPCB air quality bulletin, the AQI at 9am was recorded in the "severe" category with a reading of 408. The weatherman has forecast very dense fog for the day , with the maximum temperature expected to settle around 16 degrees Celsius. *—PTI*

SC bins plea against women quota act

The Act reserves one-third seats for women in LS & Assemblies for women

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

The Supreme Court on Friday refused to examine pleas challenging the delimitation clause in the Nari Shakti Vandan Act (NSVA) 2023 which reserves one-third seats for women in Lok Sabha and state assemblies.

A bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and PB Varale was not inclined to entertain the petitions filed by one Jaya Thakur and the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) under Article 32 of the Constitution.

The bench pointed out Jaya Thakur's petition challenged the bill, which had become the Act, whereas the NFIW challenged the delimitation clause of the law.

While Thakur's plea was dismissed as infructuous, the court was not inclined to examine the NFIW's plea under Article 32, saying it could move the high court or any other appropriate forum.

The NFIW challenged the constitutional validity of Article 334A (1) or Clause 5 of the 2023 Act where it rendered delimitation of constituencies a prerequisite to the implementation of the Act.

The top court, while hearing Thakur's plea on 3 November, 2023, said it would be "very difficult" for the court to strike down a part of the women's reservation law which would come into effect after the census.

The court refused to issue a notice on Thakur's plea and asked the counsel for the petitioner to serve the copy on the lawyer representing the Centre.

On 21 September, 2023, the watershed bill to reserve one-third of the seats in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies for women received the parliamentary nod.

The constitutional amendment bill was passed by the Lok Sabha with near unanimity and the Rajya Sabha with unanimity.

The law would take some time before implementation as the next census and the subsequent delimitation exercise — redrawing of Lok Sabha and assembly constituencies — would ascertain the particular seats being earmarked for women. *—PTI*

The constitutional amendment bill was passed by the Lok Sabha with near unanimity and the Rajya Sabha with unanimity **PHOTO: PTI**

JEE: SC lets petitioners who dropped out in Nov register

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

The Supreme Court on Friday allowed petitioners, who dropped out from their courses between 5 and 18 November, 2024, to register for Joint Entrance Examination (JEE)-Advanced.

A bench of Justices BR Gavai and Augustine George Masih passed the order while hearing the pleas against bringing down from three to two the attempts given to JEE-Advanced aspirants. The apex court noted the joint admission board (JAB), entrusted to conduct the JEE-Advanced exam, had issued a press release on 5 November last year which said students who appeared for the Class 12 examination in academic years 2023, 2024 and 2025 would be eligible to appear for the JEE-Advanced. The bench further said another press release was issued on 18 November, 2024, restricting the eligibility only to two academic years – 2024 and 2025. "If the students, acting on the said representation, have dropped from their course with an understanding that they would be entitled to appear for JEE examination, the withdrawal of the promise on 18 November, 2024 cannot be permitted to act to their detriment," it held. *—PTI*

SC opens doors to people for guided tours

Opening its doors for augmenting public engagement and awareness, the Supreme Court has allowed guided tours for people on designated days. The drive allows people to put to rest their curiosities on the court's mystique, and stroll through its majestic corridors every working Saturday -- except the second and the fourth and declared holidays. The tour shall be conducted on every working Saturday, except second and fourth Saturdays and declared holidays in four slots from 10am to 11.30am; 11:30am to 1pm; 2pm to 3.30pm and 3.30pm to 5pm.

No tree cutting in Mumbai without SC nod

Supreme Court on Friday directed the tree authority of Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation not to allow tree felling in Mumbai's Aarey colony without its permission. A bench comprising Justices Abhay S Oka and Aravind Kumar said the authority could process the applications and then seek orders from the court. The order came after the Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation Limited said there was no pending proposal to fell more trees in the area. The court posted the hearing on 5 March. *—PTI*

SC backs consolidation of Mathura mosque pleas

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

The Supreme Court on January 10, 2025, said a plea challenging the Allahabad High Court's order to consolidate 15 lawsuits in the Mathura Sri Krishna Janmabhoomi-Shahi Idgah Masjid dispute can be raised later. The SC bench expressed a prima facie view in favor of consolidation, stating it benefits both parties. The High Court had ordered the suits' consolidation in January 2024 to save time and avoid conflicting judgments. The top court had previously restrained courts from hearing new lawsuits or passing orders on religious sites. The SC will hear the issue again in April 2025. *—PTI*

People gather at the locality where the bodies of five members of a family were found at their home, in Uttar Pradesh's Meerut **PHOTO: PTI**

'Sardar' of labourers held, dewatering on in Assam mine

GUWAHATI, 10 JAN

The 'sardar' of workers of the coal mine in Assam's Dima Hasao, where eight miners remained trapped, was arrested, even as a dewatering exercise continued in the quarry to facilitate the resumption of rescue operations, police said on Friday.

The fate of the trapped miners appeared to be grim with personnel involved in the rescue operations racing against time to bring them out of the ill-fated quarry, while the body of one labourer, hailing from Nepal, has been recovered from there, an official said.

This is the second arrest in the case. The arrested person is Hanan Laskar, and Punish Nunisa; the lease-holder of the quarry, was held on the second day of the incident in connection with the case, the official said.

The labourers were on Monday trapped inside the 3-Kilo Coal Quarry in Umrangso area, around 250 km from Guwahati, after a sudden gush of water flooded the site.

Nine labourers were trapped and the body of one labourer has been recovered so far. Dewatering of the quarry, which is 340 feet deep, has been continuing with specialised machines brought in by ONGC and Coal India, the official said. *—PTI*

Family of 5 killed in UP, 3 bodies stuffed in bed box

MEERUT, 10 JAN

Five members of a family were found killed in their home, the bodies of the parents wrapped in sheets and their three children, the youngest one-year-old, stuffed in sacks and kept in a bed box, police said on Friday. Two people were detained for the grisly murders that shocked this Uttar Pradesh town.

Several suspects have also been taken into custody for the killing that came to light on Thursday night.

All five had deep head injuries and slash marks on their necks.

The family lived in a rented home in the densely populated Suhail Garden neighbourhood in the Lisari Gate police station area.

Police added that one named suspect is absconding.

The deceased are Moin alias Moinuddin, 52; his wife Asma, 45; and their daughters Afsah, 8; Aziza, 4; and Adeeba, 1.

The bodies of the children were found stuffed in sacks and hidden in the bed's storage compartment, the police said, adding all the victims had deep head injuries and slash marks on their necks.

Asma's brother, Shamim, lodged a complaint late at night. He accused Asma's younger sister-in-law, Nazrana, and her two brothers of involvement in the suspected murders.

Police said the investigations point towards an old enmity.

Police said the legs of one of the deceased were found tied with a bedsheet.

The family had recently moved to the area and the police are investigating their background to find out more details.

Police said the family's house was locked from outside when locals and neighbours checked it in the evening.

Moin, who is a mechanic by mason, and Asma had been missing since Wednesday, Tada said.

Moin's brother Salim was the first to witness the horrifying scene when he went to check on the family concerned over his brother's whereabouts.

Salim arrived at Moin's house with his wife. After several unsuccessful attempts to open the door, they forced entry with the help of neighbours.

"After gaining access through the roof, they found the bodies," police told reporters. *—PTI*

Air India flight returns to Chennai due to snag

CHENNAI, 10 JAN

A Singapore bound Air India flight on Friday returned to the city after pilots detected a technical snag mid-air, officials at the airport here and the airliner said.

The pilots contacted the airport upon discovering the issue, to return to the city and the flight, with about 170 passengers later made a safe landing, they added.

An Air India official said the flight AI 346 from Chennai to Singapore returned due to the suspected technical issue.

The aircraft landed safely for precautionary checks. All passengers and crew disembarked safely, the official added.

The official also said alternative arrangements were made to promptly fly the passengers to Singapore from Chennai. *—PTI*

NEW PANGOLIN SPECIES

Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) scientists identified a new pangolin species which diverged from the Chinese pangolin (Manis pentadactyla) around 3.4 million years ago in Arunachal Pardesh. The ZSI said the discovery of the Indo-Burmese pangolin (Manis indo-burmanica) sheds light on the evolutionary diversity of pangolins, likely influenced by dramatic geo-climatic changes in the region, a biodiversity hotspots **PHOTO: X**

ANGAMALY-ERNAKULAM CLASH

Kerala priests turn to violence during protest

KOCHI, 10 JAN

A protest by a section of priests demanding the dismissal of the newly constituted curia of the Angamaly-Ernakulam archdiocese at its headquarters in Kochi turned violent on Thursday.

The police intervened and pacified the protesters, a church source said. No case has been registered so far, police said.

Curia is a body that helps the church run smoothly and efficiently, church sources said, adding that the clash erupted on Thursday after 21 priests began a fast prayer at the archbishop's house.

The priests belonging to Archdiocese Protection Committee (Athiroopatha Samrakshana Samithi), protested, urging the expulsion of curia members involved in multiple cases from the diocesan administrative committee.

The police intervened and pacified the protesters. No case has been registered so far **PHOTO: X**

"We will not relent until the atrocities carried out by Apostolic Administrator Bosco Puthur, with the backing of the criminal curia members, are brought to an end," a statement issued by Fr Jose Vailikodath of the Athiroopatha Samrakshana Samithi said.

The priests started an indefinite fast, demanding withdrawal of documents issued by Bishop Puthur. Those documents "unjustly suspended priests in violation of both canon and civil laws", the statement claimed.

"We will not tolerate such misuse of power, which threatens to alienate us from the Archdiocese's headquarters and assets that our ancestors and we have painstakingly built," the statement said.

Meanwhile, the Syro-Malabar Church Synod has ordered disciplinary action against the protesting priests. *—PTI*

Kerala govt reinstates suspended IAS officer

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, 10 JAN

The Kerala government has reinstated IAS officer K Gopalakrishnan who was suspended for allegedly creating a religion-based WhatsApp group of government officials.

The government, however, decided to continue the suspension of IAS officer N Prasanth for 120 days more. Prasanth was suspended for criticising a senior IAS officer on social media. Both officers were suspended on 11 November last year. In the order reinstating Gopalakrishnan, the government said the Suspension Review Committee (SRC) reviewed his suspension and observed that there was "no substantive ground necessitating the continuation of the officer under suspension".

"The Committee recommended the disciplinary authority to revoke the suspension of the officer pending finalisation of disciplinary action against him. The government has examined the matter in detail and are pleased to accept the recommendation of the SRC. The officer is reinstated in service, pending finalisation of disciplinary action against him," said a 9 January government order. In the case of Prasanth, the government said that the Committee has recommended that his suspension be continued for a further period of 120 days with effect from 10 January. "The government has accepted the recommendation of the SRC, and hereby order that the period of suspension of Prasanth N IAS is extended for a further period of 120 days with effect from 10 January," said another 9 January government order. *—PTI*

ODE TO ITALIAN CRAFTMANSHIP

Creations are displayed during the exhibition "From the Heart to the Hands: Dolce&Gabbana" at the Grand Palais, in Paris. For the first time in their 40-year history, the Italian design duo Dolce & Gabbana are showcasing their work in Paris. The event running from 10 January to 31 March, is not only a love letter to Italian craftsmanship but also to the interconnectedness of fashion ***PHOTO: PTI***

2024 was first to breach 1.5°C heat limit

Every month from January to June 2024 was the warmest ever recorded for those months ***PHOTO: PTI***

The year 2024 was the hottest year on record, and the first with a global average temperature 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, European climate agency Copernicus confirmed on Friday.

Every month from January to June 2024 was the warmest ever recorded for those months. From July to December, except for August, each month was the second warmest on record, behind 2023, it said.

According to scientists at the Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S), 2024 was the hottest year since global temperature tracking began in 1850.

The average global temperature was 15.1 degrees Celsius -- 0.72 degrees above the 1991-2020 average and 0.12 degrees higher than that in 2023, the previous record-holder.

Scientists noted that the average temperature in 2024 was 1.60 degrees Celsius above the 1850-1900 baseline, the period before human activities like burning fossil fuels began significantly impacting the climate.

This is the first time the average global temperature has remained 1.5 degrees Celsius above the 1850-1900 average for an entire calendar year.

However, a permanent breach of the 1.5-degree Celsius limit specified in the Paris Agreement refers to long-term warming over a 20- or 30-year period.

That said, experts feel that the world is now entering a phase where temperatures will be consistently above this threshold.

Harjeet Singh, climate activist and the founding director of Satat Sampada Climate Foundation, said the world is entering a new climate reality -- one where extreme heatwaves, devastating floods, and intense storms will become increasingly fre-quent and severe.

"To prepare for this future, we must urgently scale up adaptation efforts across every level of society -- redesigning our homes, cities, and infrastructure, and transforming how we manage water, food, and energy systems," he said.

Singh said the world must move from fossil fuels to clean energy quickly and fairly, making sure no one is left behind, and that rich countries have a bigger responsibility to take bold steps.

C3S scientists said that in 2024, greenhouse gas levels in the atmosphere hit their highest annual levels ever recorded. Car-bon dioxide levels were 2.9 parts per million (ppm) higher than in 2023, reaching 422 ppm, while methane levels rose by 3 parts per billion (ppb), reaching 1897 ppb.

Sea ice extent in the Arctic and around Antarctica, which is an essential indicator of the stability of Earth's climate, reached "record or near-record low values" for the second year in a row.

The year 2024 will also be remembered as the year developed nations had their last big chance to prevent the world from permanently crossing the 1.5 degrees Celsius threshold by funding climate action in the Global South, but that didn't seem to materialise.

Relentless warming fuelled record-breaking heatwaves, deadly storms, and floods that devastated lives and homes by the thousands in 2024. Millions were displaced, and all eyes turned to the UN climate conference in Baku, Azerbaijan, hoping for a climate finance package capable of ramping up action in the Global South.

A study published in 2023 estimated that developed countries owe around USD 170 trillion for their excessive emissions, hav-ing consumed 70–90 per cent of the total carbon budget since the industrial era.

Instead, developed countries -- mandated under the UN climate regime to finance climate action in developing countries -- offered a paltry USD 300 billion by 2035, a mere fraction of the trillions needed annually from 2025.

While political will remains fragmented, science continues to remind the world that it's an emergency.

In 2015, countries came together to limit global warming to "well below 2 degrees Celsius", aiming for 1.5 degrees Celsius. Fast forward, the world has already heated up by 1.3 degrees Celsius since the pre-industrial era, largely due to burning fossil fuels.

To limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, the UN's climate science body, IPCC, says emissions must peak by 2025 and drop 43 per cent by 2030 and 57 per cent by 2035.

Yet, current policies point to a hotter future -- around 3 degrees Celsius warming by 2100. Even if every country fulfils its cli-mate promises or Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), emissions will only shrink by a weak 5.9 per cent by 2030, far below what's needed. *—PTI*

SALAR

Freebies dominate poll debate, not Delhi's issues

The political discourse in Delhi is currently being dominated by conversations around "freebies" ahead of the assembly polls overshadowing other major issues including pollution, law and order, crimes against women and infrastructure.

Earlier today, Aam Aadmi Party supremo Arvind Kejriwal promised financial assistance to Residential Welfare Associations to hire security guards when the party returns to power in the national capital.

Former Delhi chief minister Kejriwal, is leading the charge with its campaigns like "Revdi Par Charcha", emphasising its free electricity, water, healthcare, education, and public transport initiatives for women. It has also announced new schemes, including the Mukhya Mantri Mahila Samman Yojana, promising Rs 2,100 monthly for women, and the Sanjeevani Yojana, ensuring free healthcare for senior citizens in both government and private hospitals.

Congress has countered with its 'Pyaari Didi Yojana', offering Rs 2,500 monthly for women, alongside the 'Jeevan Raksha Yojana', which promises insurance coverage of up to Rs 25 lakh. Meanwhile, the BJP is likely to unveil its manifesto soon, with anticipated schemes such as 300 units of free electricity for households and Rs 2,500 monthly allowances for women.

Even Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who termed these free schemes as 'free ki revdi' once, had to reassure the people of Delhi that the BJP would continue all the welfare schemes if voted to power.

"Facing defeat, these AAPda people are perplexed. They are scaring Delhiites that if the BJP comes to power, this or that scheme will be discontinued. But I have come to assure Delhiites that under BJP rule, no scheme will be stopped, but those involved in corruption in these schemes will be weeded out," Modi said, urging the people to vote for a "double-engine" BJP government both at the Centre and in Delhi.

With such announcements grabbing the voters' attention, critical issues like pollution, especially the smog that chokes Delhi every winter, remain largely unaddressed. Many residents have raised concerns over the lack of concrete action plans to combat air pollution, which continues to pose a severe health risk to Delhiites.

The air quality index (AQI) of the national capital crossed 490 in November last year, falling into the "se-vere plus" category, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). Many people are facing various health issues due to toxic air.

Delhiites also experienced water shortages throughout the city due to high levels of ammonia in the Yamuna River with water treatment plants unable to treat the water.

Many people lost their lives during the rainy season in the national capital due to potholes on the roads and open sewers. The drowning of three UPSC aspirants in Delhi's Rajinder Nagar coaching centre due to poor drainage and lack of desilting sparked outrage among the residents over the lack of facilities for the residents.

The national capital also faced many law and order issues, with shootouts taking place at multiple locations due to the alleged involvement of various gangs said to be active in the city. Additionally, there has been a rise in crimes against women.

While the promises of free welfare schemes attract many voters, some argue that addressing these sys-temic core issues is vital for the city's long-term growth.

Reacting to the freebies in the polls, Bhartiya Liberal Party president Munish Kumar Raizada told PTI, "Kejriwal is an utter failure in terms of governance in last 10 years. He has encouraged the culture of freebies while paralyzing governance and policy-making at the same time."

'He alleged that the AAP government has ignored other major issues like job creation and finding a solution for contractual employees.

"Kejriwal just gave some rewaris while the youth are sitting unemployed. And now all political parties are going a step forward by enticing voters by throwing cash on them, which is actually cash for vote or note for vote. Nothing can be more unethical than this," Raizada told PTI.

Nitin Singh, Central Coordinator of the Bahujan Samaj Party, said that the freebies being announced by these parties are all lies. If they had addressed the basic needs of the people, there would have been no need for such fake commitments. Singh said that the current situation in Delhi is very poor, and because of this, the government is introducing new advertisements. *—PTI*

BJP has announced new schemes, including the Mukhya Mantri Mahila Samman Yojana, promising Rs 2,100 monthly for women, whereas BJP is yet to announce the poll manifesto ***PHOTO: PTI***

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Utility lines most likely caused the raging California wildfire

While lightning, arson and utility lines are the most common causes, debris burning and fireworks are also common causes of the wildfires ***PHOTOS: PTI***

Investigators are considering an array of possible ignition sources for the huge fires that have killed at least 10 people and destroyed thousands of homes and businesses in the Los Angeles area.

In hilly, upscale Pacific Palisades, home to Hollywood stars like Jamie Lee Curtis and Billy Crystal who lost houses in the fire, officials have placed the origin of the wind-whipped blaze behind a home on Piedra Morada Drive, which sits above a densely wooded arroyo.

While lightning is the most common source of fires in the US, according to the National Fire Protection Association, investigators were able to rule that out quickly. There were no reports of lightning in the Palisades area or the terrain around the Eaton fire, which started in east Los Angeles County and has also destroyed hundreds of homes.

The next two most common causes: fires intentionally set, and those sparked by utility lines. John Lentini, owner of Scientific Fire Analysis in Florida, who has investigated large fires in California including the Oakland Hills fire in 1991, said the size and scope of the blaze doesn't change the approach to finding out what caused it.

"This was once a small fire," Lentini said. "People will focus on where the fire started, determine the origin and look around the origin and determine the cause." So far there has been no official indication of arson in either blaze, and utility lines have not yet been identified as a cause either.

Utilities are required to report to the California Public Utilities Commission when they know of "electric incidents potentially associated with a wildfire," Terrie Prosper, the commission's communications director, said via email. CPUC staff then investi-gate to see if there were violations of state law.

The 2017 Thomas Fire, one of the largest fires in state history, was sparked by Southern California Edison power lines that came into contact during high wind, investigators determined. The blaze killed two people and charred more than 1,140sqkm, according to the investigation headed by the Ventura County Fire Department.

So far no such reports for the current fires have been posted to the CPUC website that tracks such filings.

While lightning, arson and utility lines are the most common causes, debris burning and fireworks are also common causes. But fires are incited by myriad sources, including accidents. In 2021, a couple's gender reveal stunt started a large fire that torched close to 36 square miles (about 90 square kilometers) of terrain, destroyed five homes and 15 other buildings and claimed the life of a firefighter, Charlie Morton.

The Eaton and Palisades fires were still burning with little to no containment on Thursday. Winds softened, but there was no rain in the forecast as the flames moved through miles of dry landscape. "It's going to go out when it runs out of fuel, or when the weather stops," Lentini said. "They're not going to put that thing out until it's ready to go out."

Dozens of blocks were flattened to smoldering rubble in scenic Pacific Palisades. Only the outlines of homes and their chimneys remained. In Malibu, blackened palm strands were all that was left above debris where oceanfront homes once stood. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Estonia steps up Baltic Sea patrol after 'cable sabotage'

BALTIC SEA, 10 JAN

As they plied the gray, icy waters of the Baltic Sea west of Russia on Thursday, the crew of the Estonian minehunter EML Sakala kept a careful eye on any vessels slowing down suspiciously or suddenly changing course. They use binoculars and cameras with long zoom lenses, logging the names of ships, scouring them for missing anchors or trailing cables. The Sakala has approached about 200 vessels in a week at sea. It is one of three Estonian navy ships that are part of stepped-up maritime patrols by NATO countries after the Estlink-2 power cable and communication links between Finland and Estonia were damaged Dec. 25. A month earlier, two other undersea data cables were damaged. *—PTI*

Italy's FM to visit Syria to support transition talks

ROME, 10 JAN

Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani is set to travel to Syria on Friday, aiming to support the country's transition following the recent ousting of President Bashar Assad by Islamist insurgents. Tajani highlighted the necessity for Europe to reassess its sanctions on Syria in light of the shifting political landscape. This announcement followed a meeting in Rome with officials from Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and the United States, where Tajani discussed proposals for private investments in Syrian healthcare. He underscored the importance of ensuring equal rights for all Syrians, particularly minorities facing challenges under the new authorities of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, which is designated as a terrorist organisation by both the US and UN. *—PTI*

Chinese musician detained in Hong Kong controversy

BEIJING, 10 JAN

Fei Xiaosheng, a prominent musician and performance artist known for his support of the Hong Kong democracy movement, has been arrested by police in Xi'an. The 55-year-old is currently detained at the Beilin Detention Centre, according to associates from Beijing's Songzhuang Artists' Village, a hub for dissident artists, as reported by Radio Free Asia. Fei's arrest occurs during a broader crackdown on artists whose works are deemed subversive by the Communist Party. His colleague, Gao Zhen, has also been detained on charges related to "insulting revolutionary heroes." Fellow artist Du Yinghong, now in Thailand, expressed his shock at Fei's detention, noting that Fei had recently applied for a passport to leave China. *—PTI*

8 hurt in hammer attack at Japanese university

TOKYO, 10 JAN

At least eight people were injured in a hammer attack at Tokyo's Hosei University Tama Campus on Friday, 10 January, according to Japanese media. Japanese media channel NHK reported that a 22-year-old female student was arrested in connection with the attack. The suspect allegedly targeted people in a classroom, stating she felt ignored and frustrated. All the injured were reported to be conscious. While violence is common on US campuses, such incidents are rare in Japan due to strict gun laws. Stabbing attacks have occurred occasionally, but violent crimes remain uncommon. One of the most shocking incidents in recent years was the 2022 assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. *—Agencies*

LA fire burns 10,000 structures, kills 10

The damage and economic loss from the wildfires is estimated to be $135-150 billion

LOS ANGELES, 10 JAN

The two biggest wildfires ravaging the Los Angeles area have killed 10 people so far and burned at least 10,000 homes, buildings and other structures, officials said Thursday as they urged more people to heed evacuation orders after a new blaze ignited and quickly grew.

The fast-moving Kenneth Fire started in the late afternoon in the San Fernando Valley just 3.2kms from a school serving as a shelter for fire evacuees and then moved into neighbouring Ventura County by the evening.

Only hours earlier officials expressed encouragement after firefighters aided by calmer winds and help from crews from outside the state saw the first signs of successfully beating back the region's devastating wildfires that have killed 10 people so far.

"We are expecting this fire to rapidly spread due to high winds," Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass said, echoing the forecast that called for winds to strengthen Thursday evening through Friday morning.

The orders came as Los Angeles County officials announced the Eaton Fire near Pasadena that started Tuesday night has burned more than 5,000 structures, a term that includes homes, apartment buildings, businesses, outbuildings and vehicles. To the west in Pacific Palisades, the largest of the fires burning in the LA area has destroyed over 5,300 structures.

At least five churches, a synagogue, seven schools, two libraries, boutiques, bars, restaurants, banks and groceries were lost. AccuWeather, a private company that provides data on weather and its impact, on Thursday increased its estimate of the damage and economic loss to USD 135-USD 150 billion.

At least 180,000 people were under evacuation orders, and the fires have consumed about 117 sqkm — roughly the size of San Francisco. The Palisades Fire is already the most destructive in Los Angeles' history. *—PTI*

A helicopter drops water on the flames in West Hills, Los Angeles; The devastation of the Palisades Fire is seen in the Pacific Palisades neighbourhood of Los Angeles **PHOTOS: PTI/X**

It was a political witch hunt, never falsified biz records, says Trump

NEW YORK, 10 JAN

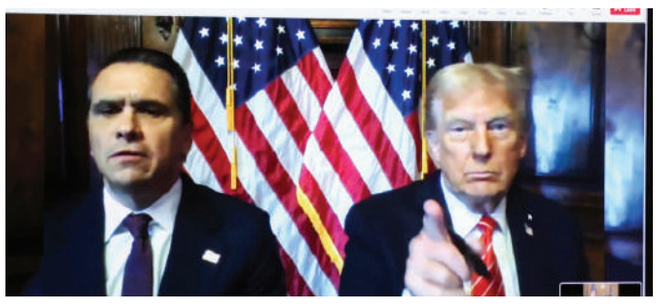
"It's been a political witch hunt. It was done to damage my reputation so that I would lose the election, and obviously, that didn't work," Trump said while addressing the court in his hush money case.

Trump called the case "a weaponisation of government" and "an embarrassment to New York".

Prosecutors said Friday that they supported a no-penalty sentence, but they chided Trump's attacks on the legal system throughout and after the case.

"The once and future President of the United States has engaged in a coordinated campaign to undermine its legitimacy," prosecutor Joshua Steinglass said.

Before the hearing, a handful of Trump supporters and critics gathered outside. One group held a banner that read, "Trump is guilty." The other held one that said, "Stop partisan conspiracy" and "Stop political witch hunt." "I never falsified business records. It is a fake, made-up charge," he wrote on his Truth Social platform last week. While the specific charges were about checks, the underlying accusations were seamy and deeply entangled with Trump's political rise. Prosecutors said Daniels was paid off — through Trump's personal attorney at the time, Michael Cohen — as part of a wider effort to keep voters from hearing about Trump's alleged extramarital escapades. *—PTI*



President-elect Donald Trump, right, appears remotely with attorney Todd Blanche for a sentencing hearing on Friday **PHOTO: X**

Canada's Liberal Party to decide next PM on 9 March

TORONTO, 10 JAN

- Justin Trudeau announced his resignation Monday after facing an increasing loss of support both within his party and in the country

Canada's governing Liberal Party will announce the country's next prime minister on 9 March after a leadership vote that follows the resignation of Justin Trudeau this week, party leaders said late Thursday.

Trudeau remains prime minister until a new leader is chosen.

The front runners for the Liberal leadership are former central banker Mark Carney and ex-Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland, whose abrupt resignation last month forced Trudeau's exit.

"After a robust and secure nation-wide process, the Liberal Party of Canada will choose a new leader on 9 March, and be ready to fight and win the 2025 election," Sachit Mehra, President of the Liberal Party of Canada, said in a statement.

The political upheaval comes at a difficult moment for Canada. US president-elect Donald Trump keeps calling Canada the 51st state and has threatened to impose 25per cent tariffs on all Canadian goods.

The next Liberal leader could be the shortest-tenured prime minister in the country's history. All three opposition parties have vowed to bring down the Liberals' minority government in a no confidence vote after Parliament resumes on 24 March. Recent polls suggest the Liberals' chances of winning the next election look slim. In the latest poll by Nanos, the Liberals trail the opposition Conservatives 45 per cent to 23 per cent.

Trudeau announced his resignation Monday after facing an increasing loss of support both within his party and in the country. *—PTI*

PIERRE: THE ONE WHO COULD BE NEXT CANADA PM

Canada's Conservative Party leader Pierre Poilievre - now 45 - laid out a low-tax, small government vision for the country in an essay contest on what he would do as prime minister.

He is now one step closer to making his vision a reality, and even gave a nod to the essay in a recent interview with conservative psychologist and commentator Jordan Peterson.

Poll after poll has shown career politician Pierre Poilievre and his Conservative Party handily winning Canada's next federal election. Poilievre was born in Canada's western province of Alberta to a 16-year-old mother who put him up for adoption. He was taken in by two school teachers, who raised him in suburban Calgary. Poilievre went on to win a seat in Ottawa in 2004 at the age of 25, making him one of the youngest elected Conservatives at the time. He has held that seat since. He has been described as a "soft" populist for his direct appeals to everyday Canadians and criticism of establishment elites, including corporate Canada. He has pushed back at Trump's comments suggesting Canada become a 51st US state, vowing to "put Canada first". *—Agencies*

23-year-old hostage and his dad's body recovered in Gaza

JERUSALEM, 10 JAN

Israel's army has confirmed that the body recovered from Gaza earlier this week belonged to 23-year-old hostage Hamzah AlZayadni. His remains were found alongside those of his father, Yosef AlZayadni, both taken by Hamas-led militants during an incursion into southern Israel 15 months ago. While his father was quickly identified, confirmation of Hamzah's identity required additional verification.

In recent weeks, there have been tentative movements toward a ceasefire agreement and the release of hostages held by Hamas. Families of the hostages, along with Palestinian officials, have been urging the Israeli government and international leaders to secure a ceasefire.

According to Gaza's Health Ministry, the ongoing conflict has claimed the lives of 46,006 Palestinians, with 109,378 reported injuries. A significant portion of those killed are said to be women and children; however, the ministry has not disclosed specific figures regarding militants versus civilians among the deceased.

The Israeli military asserts that over 17,000 militants have been killed but has not provided substantiating evidence. Israel holds Hamas accountable for the high civilian toll, citing that militants operate within populated areas.

Yosef AlZayadni **PHOTO: X**

Tanker hit by Yemen rebels salvaged

The oil tanker Sounion, which burned for weeks in the Red Sea and posed a significant risk of environmental disaster, has been successfully salvaged, according to a security firm. The vessel, carrying 1 million barrels of crude oil, was attacked by Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthi rebels on 21 August and later sabotaged with explosives. Following the incident, a French destroyer rescued its 25 crew members. *—PTI*

South Korea's presidential security Chief resigns

SEOUL, 10 JAN

South Korea's acting leader, Deputy Prime Minister Choi Sang-mok, has accepted the resignation of Park Jong-joon, head of the presidential security service, following his police questioning regarding the obstruction of law enforcement efforts to detain impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol.

Choi expressed regret over recent confrontations between law enforcement and the presidential security service amid attempts to apprehend Yoon, who has remained in his official residence for weeks. He urged lawmakers to forge a bipartisan agreement for an independent investigation into the matter.

Authorities, including the Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials and police, are preparing a second attempt to take Yoon into custody. This follows an earlier failed attempt linked to his brief declaration of martial law on 3 December. The situation continues to unfold as tensions between numerous factions grow amid the ongoing political crisis. *—PTI*

Japan imposes sanctions on Russia

TOKYO, 10 JAN

Japan has announced a new round of sanctions against Russia in response to its ongoing conflict in Ukraine, including asset freezes for dozens of individuals and organisations. The Japanese government aims to demonstrate its alignment with the Group of Seven (G7) nations in reinforcing measures against Russia's actions.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi stated that these additional sanctions reflect Japan's commitment to global peace and the resolution of issues arising from the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This move follows a reaffirmation of Japan's strategy by Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba during an online G7 summit in December. A joint statement from Japan's foreign, trade, and finance ministries detailed the sanctions, which encompass an asset freeze for 11 individuals, 29 organisations, and three Russian banks, alongside a North Korean and a Georgian bank accused of facilitating sanction evasion. The Cabinet has banned exports to 22 military-related Russian organisations, alongside a comprehensive list of 335 items—effective from 23 January—that cannot be exported to Russia. This list includes construction vehicle engines, motorised bicycles, and various mechanical tools.

Additionally, export restrictions will impact 31 non-Russian entities allegedly aiding Russia in evading sanctions, which include organisations based in Hong Kong, mainland China, Turkey, Kyrgyzstan, Thailand, the UAE, and Kazakhstan. *—PTI*

TO CURB CHINESE INFLUENCE

US Supreme Court to consider TikTok ban

WASHINGTON DC, 10 JAN

The US supreme court will hear oral arguments over the fate of TikTok on Friday. It's the latest battle in the long war over whether to ban the tremendously popular social media app in the US – and will force the justices to weigh the importance of national security with the freedom of speech.

TikTok and its parent company, Chinese-based ByteDance, asked the supreme court to review the case after a lower court ruled last month to uphold a law to ban the app in the US. That ban is scheduled to go into effect on 19 January, unless ByteDance sells TikTok's assets to a non-Chinese company. While ByteDance has the option to divest, it claimed in a legal filing that divestiture "is simply not possible: not commercially, not technologically, not legally".

Oral arguments are expected to last two hours, during which each side will be allotted time to make their case. In a filing, the court wrote that both sides should be prepared to argue whether the ban violates the first amendment.

TikTok has 170 million US users on its platform, about half of the country's population, and the prospect of banning the app has brought together unlikely allies. On one side are those who herald the ban, saying TikTok has the potential to be manipulated by the Chinese Communist party, which includes a bipartisan coalition of Congress members.

On the other side are countless influencers, civil liberties groups and, more recently, Donald Trump, who first proposed banning TikTok nearly five years ago.

Now, US president-elect Donald Trump and others say prohibiting Americans from accessing the app would violate the free speech of tens of millions of people. *—Guardian*

US president-elect Donald Trump and others say prohibiting the app would violate the free speech of tens of millions of people **PHOTO: X**

Militants attack police checkpost in Balochistan

KARACHI, 10 JAN

Armed militants launched an assault on a police checkpost in the volatile Balochistan province of Pakistan on Thursday, setting fire to machinery at a nearby cement factory before escaping. The incident occurred in Mastung town during a routine changeover of security personnel, allowing the attackers to seize weapons, ammunition, wireless communications devices, and motorcycles.

Authorities confirmed that the militants fled the scene prior to the arrival of security forces, and fortunately, there were no reported casualties. Shortly before this attack, similar actions by suspected members of proscribed separatist groups were reported in Khuzdar, where militants allegedly robbed a bank and set fire to a police station.

PHOTO: PTI

Security analysts note that separatist groups in Balochistan have become increasingly audacious, intensifying their assaults on security forces and civilians. The province's rugged and expansive landscape, comprised of difficult mountainous terrain and remote areas, facilitates such operations for militants.

Balochistan, which shares borders with Iran and Afghanistan, has been plagued by a long-standing violent insurgency. *—PTI*

Rupee hits 86 against USD, settles 14 p lower

MUMBAI, 10 JAN

The rupee declined 14 paise and touched the crucial 86.00-mark (provisional) for the first time against the US dollar on Friday as it failed to resist pressure from a stronger American currency and huge outflow of foreign funds. Surging crude oil prices overseas and negative sentiment in domestic equity markets also weighed down the Indian currency, forex traders said.Dollar strengthened on demand amid anticipation of restrictive trade measures by the new US administration after Donald Trump takes over as president on 20 January. At the interbank foreign exchange, rupee opened at 85.88, hit the intra-day peak of 85.85 before settling at lowest-ever level of 86.00 (provisional) against the greenback, 14 paise lower from its previous close. *—PTI*

Gold rises to ₹80,550/10gm; silver trades flat

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

The appliances and consumer electronics industry has urged the government to introduce a second round of the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme, focusing on high-value components like compressors and motors. The industry body, Consumer Electronics & Appliances Manufacturers Association (CEAMA), also advocated for tax rationalisation and reduced import tariffs to enhance global competitiveness. CEAMA President Sunil Vachani expressed the need for lower tariffs and taxes, stating, "We have a large base and we should be manufacturing for the world." He suggested establishing large centres of excellence along coastal areas to provide MSMEs with "plug and play" facilities, along with attractive land rates for major corporations. This initiative, Vachani noted, would bolster export competitiveness. *—PTI*

SpiceJet to fly 10 grounded aircraft by mid-April

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

SpiceJet will unground 10 aircraft by mid-April 2025, in a move aimed at strengthening its network and operational capabilities. As per the airline, these will include four Boeing 737 MAX planes. This initiative is expected to significantly increase the current fleet size of 28 aircraft, even as some aircraft are redelivered to lessors during the same period. SpiceJet added 10 planes to its fleet since October 2024, comprising three previously grounded aircraft brought back into service and seven inducted on lease. Over the past three months, SpiceJet's network expansion strategy has resulted in the addition of more than 60 new flights, further enhancing connectivity and service options for its passengers. *—ANI*

Wheat procurement target set at 30MT

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

The government has announced a conservative wheat procurement target of 30 million tonnes for the rabi marketing season of 2025-26, according to sources. This target comes despite the Agriculture Ministry's ambitious forecast of a record wheat production of 115 million tonnes for the 2024-25 crop year (July-June). As the rabi marketing season approaches, the minimum support price for wheat has been established at Rs 2,425 per quintal. The target was determined after discussions with state food secretaries. The Food Corporation of India, along with state agencies, plays a crucial role in wheat procurement, ensuring that farmers receive minimum support prices while also addressing the requirements of various welfare schemes. In 2024-25 period, government wheat procurement reached 26.6 million tonnes. This represents an increase from 26.2 million tonnes procured in the previous year, albeit still falling short of the 34.15 million tonnes target for 2023-24. *—PTI*

States get ₹1.73L cr for tax devolution

41% of taxes is devolved in instalments

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

The Union Government has disbursed Rs 1,73,030 crore to State Governments this month, a significant increase compared to the Rs 89,086 crore allocated in December 2024.

Currently, 41 per cent of taxes collected by the Centre is devolved in instalments among states during a fiscal year.

This substantial devolution aims to empower states to enhance capital spending and support their development and welfare initiatives. Tax devolution refers to the equitable distribution of tax revenues between the central and state governments, as prescribed by the Constitution. The Finance Commission plays a critical role in recommending the distribution of the net proceeds of certain taxes between the Union and the states.

In this latest round of devolution, Uttar Pradesh received the highest allocation of Rs 31,039.84 crore, followed by Bihar with Rs 17,403.36 crore and West Bengal, which was granted Rs 13,017.06 crore. Maharashtra and Rajasthan were also significant beneficiaries, receiving Rs 10,930.31 crore and Rs 10,426.78 crore, respectively.

Uttar Pradesh got the highest allocation of Rs 31,039.84 crore **PHOTO: PTI**

In contrast, Goa and Sikkim received the smallest amounts, with Rs 667.91 crore and Rs 671.35 crore, respectively.

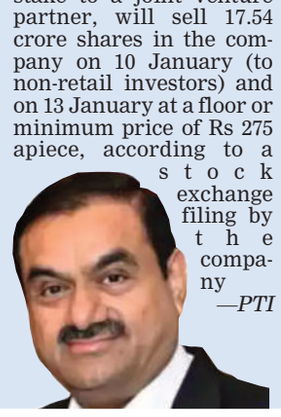
For the fiscal period between 2021 and 2026, the share of states in central tax revenues has been maintained at 41 per cent, consistent with the allocation for 2020-21, yet lower than the 42 per cent recommended by the 14th Finance Commission for the 2015-20 period. This 1 per cent adjustment accounts for the newly established Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

The allocation formula for individual states incorporates several factors: demographic performance (12.5 per cent weightage), income (45 per cent), population and area (15 per cent each), forest and ecology (10 per cent), and tax and fiscal efforts (2.5 per cent). *—ANI*

ADANI WILMAR STOCK TANKS NEARLY 10%

MUMBAI, 10 JAN

Shares of Adani Wilmar tumbled nearly 10 per cent on Friday morning following news that the Adani Group will raise Rs 7,148 crore from the sale of up to 20 per cent stake in the FMCG firm in the open market as part of its strategy to exit non-core activities to focus on infrastructure business. The stock tanked 9.84 per cent to Rs 292.05 on the BSE. At NSE, it dropped 9.69 per cent to Rs 292.10. The conglomerate, which last month announced its exit from Adani Wilmar by selling the bulk of its stake to a joint venture partner, will sell 17.54 crore shares in the company on 10 January (to non-retail investors) and on 13 January at a floor or minimum price of Rs 275 apiece, according to a stock exchange filing by the company *—PTI*



NIFTY DROPS 95 POINTS

Mkt extends losses on surging crude prices, FII outflows

MUMBAI, 10 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty nursed losses for the third consecutive session on Friday, in lockstep with a weak trend in global equities as concerns over economic growth and a slowdown in quarterly earnings sapped investors' risk appetite.

Surging crude oil prices and a strengthening dollar index also contributed to the weak trend in equities.

In a volatile trade, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex declined 241.30 points or 0.31 per cent to settle at 77,378.91. During the day, the benchmark gyrated 820.15 points between the day's high of 77,919.70 and a low of 77,099.55. The NSE Nifty dropped 95 points or 0.40 per cent to 23,431.50. From the 30-share blue-chip pack, IndusInd Bank, NTPC, UltraTech Cement, Sun Pharma, Axis Bank, State Bank of India, Tata Steel, Power Grid, Adani Ports and Kotak Mahindra Bank were among the major laggards.

Tata Consultancy Services jumped nearly 6 per cent after the IT services company reported an 11.95 per cent jump in the December quarter net profit to Rs 12,380 crore.

Tech Mahindra, HCL Tech, Infosys and Bajaj Finserv were the other big gainers.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 7,170.87 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data.

"Domestic market sentiment remained subdued due to rising crude oil prices, driven by supply concerns, and a strengthening dollar index. Despite the IT sector's resilience following positive early Q3 results, broader indices bled due to uncertainties surrounding Trump policies and high valuations. *—PTI*

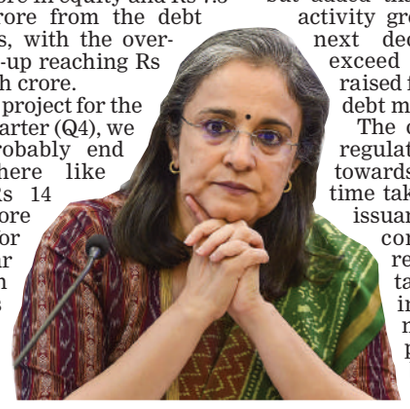
RS 14.27L CR AT FY25

Captial market fund to jump 21% in FY25: Buch

MUMBAI, 10 JAN

Overall fundraising from capital markets, including through equity and debt instruments, is estimated to jump by nearly 21 per cent to Rs 14.27 lakh crore in FY25 from the Rs 11.8 lakh crore in FY24, Sebi chief Madhabi Puri Buch said on Friday.

Buch said in the past nine months of the current fiscal, entities have mobilised Rs 3.3 lakh crore in equity and Rs 7.3 lakh crore from the debt markets, with the overall mop-up reaching Rs 10.7 lakh crore.



"If we project for the next quarter (Q4), we will probably end somewhere like over Rs 14 lakh crore raised for the year in terms of capital, both equity and debt," Buch said addressing a NISM-organised conference here.

A presentation made by Buch pegged the FY25 estimate at Rs 14.27 lakh crore.

Buch said money raised by real estate investments trusts, infrastructure investment trusts and municipal bonds has a very small contribution to the overall capital raising at around Rs 10,000 crore in the first nine months of FY25, but added that she sees the activity growing over the next decade to even exceed the money raised from equity and debt markets.

The capital markets regulator is working towards expediting the time taken for clearing issuances, Buch said, committing to reduce the time taken for clearing small and medium enterprises (SME) board proposals. *—PTI*

SEBI explores use of AI for faster processing of IPOs

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

PHOTO: X

Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch on Friday said that the market regulator is exploring the use of AI for faster approval of IPOS and Mutual Funds (MFs) applications.

"A large number of AI-driven projects are already on the way, within SEBI and one of the key, utilisations of AI that we are deploying is to do faster processing of all applications so that we can turn this around even faster," said Buch during the inaugural session of SEBI Samvad symposium.

Buch highlighted that as of November 2024, only two IPO applications were pending approval for over six months, which is a significant improvement from 8 in March 2022. She said same goes for applications for mutual funds, as of November 2024, only one such fund application was pending that was six months old.

This number was 69 in March 2022. Buch said the Indian IPO market is booming with a flood of applications being received every week. "So, if we look at today, just in the last nine months, 3.3 lakh, crores of equity rays just in the last three months. So in the last nine months, so you can safely assume another for the balanced.

Quarters will be roughly at about 4.3 lakh crores at the end of the year." *—ANI*

Vodafone exits Indus Towers, sells ₹2,800 cr shares

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

British telecom giant Vodafone has completely divested its stake in Indus Towers for Rs 2,800 crore, the telecom infrastructure firm announced on Friday.

Vodafone sold a total of 7.92 crore shares, equating to a 3 per cent stake in Indus Towers, and allocated Rs 890 crore of the proceeds to clear debts owed to lenders, as detailed in a regulatory filing.

"Vodafone Group Plc confirms the successful completion of the placement of its remaining 79.2 million shares in Indus Towers Limited ("Indus"), representing 3.0 per cent of Indus' outstanding share capital, through an accelerated book build offering on 5 December 2024," the filing stated.

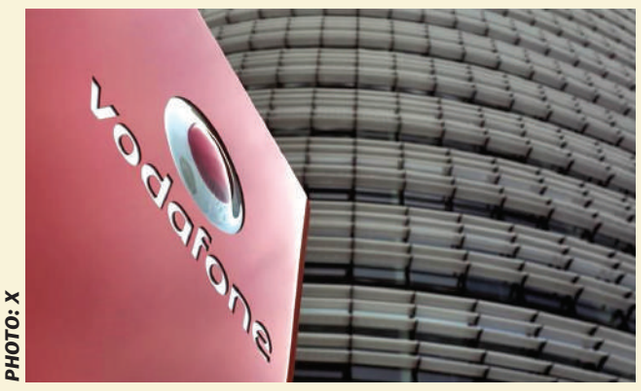


PHOTO: X

The telecom firm had held the 3 per cent stake via its wholly-owned subsidiaries, Omega Telecom Holdings Pvt Ltd and Usha Martin Telematics Limited. The remaining proceeds, totalling Rs 19.1 billion (USD 225 million), have been used to acquire 1.7 billion equity shares in Vodafone Idea Limited through a preferential allotment, increasing Vodafone's stake in Vi to 24.39 per cent, up from 22.56 per cent. Following this transaction, Vodafone Idea has utilised the funds from Vodafone's capital raise to settle outstanding dues under the Master Service Agreement with Indus, thereby fully satisfying Vodafone's obligations under the Security Arrangements, the filing concluded. *—PTI*

TCS shares jump nearly 5% post-Dec quarter earnings

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

Shares of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) jumped nearly 5 per cent on Friday morning after the IT services company reported an 11.95 per cent jump in December quarter net profit to Rs 12,380 crore.

The bellwether stock surged 4.73 per cent to Rs 4,227.70 on the BSE.

At the NSE, it climbed 4.60 per cent to Rs 4,225.

The company's market valuation soared Rs 69,829.1 crore to Rs 15,30,324.39 crore during the morning trade.

PHOTO: X

TCS emerged as the biggest gainer among the Sensex and Nifty stocks in an otherwise weak equity market trend.

Other IT stocks were also in demand, with Tech Mahindra, Infosys, HCL Tech and Wipro quoting in the positive territory. "Results of TCS indicate that the IT sector will continue to remain resilient," V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said. The Tata Group company had reported a net profit of Rs 11,058 crore in the year-ago period and Rs 11,909 crore in the preceding September quarter. The revenue grew 5.6 per cent to Rs 63,973 crore against Rs 60,583 crore in the year-ago period *—PTI*

Govt extends monthly GST return, payment deadline

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

The government on Friday extended the deadline for filing monthly GST sales return form GSTR-1 and GST payment by 2 days after taxpayers reported technical glitches in the GSTN system.

As per Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs, the last date for filing GSTR-1 for December is 13 January, while that for taxpayers opting for quarterly payment under the QRMP scheme for the October-December period will be 15 January. tHE last date for filing GSTR-1 is 11 January, while for quarterly taxpayers it is 13 January.

The deadline for GST payment by filing GSTR-3B for December has been extended to 22 January, from the existing date of 20 January.

For taxpayers who pay GST quarterly, the due date is extended to 24 January and 26 January, depending on the state-wise registration of the business. GST Network said in a post on X that it has sent an "incident report" to the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs on the technical glitches in the system and requested an extension of the filing date of GST sales return or GSTR-1. *—PTI*

India's forex kitty drops by $5B

MUMBAI, 10 JAN

India's forex reserves dropped by USD 5.693 billion to USD 634.585 billion in the week ended 3 January, the Reserve Bank of India said on Friday.

In the previous reporting week, the overall kitty had declined by USD 4.112 billion to USD 640.279 bil-lion.

The reserves have been on a declining trend for the last few weeks, and the drop has been attributed to revaluation along with forex market interventions by RBI to help reduce volatility in the rupee. The forex reserves had increased to an all-time high of USD 704.885 billion in end-September. or the week ended 3 January, foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, decreased by USD 6.441 billion to USD 545.48 billion, the data released on Friday showed.

- India's reserve position with the IMF was down by USD 18 million at USD 4.199 billion in the reporting week, the apex bank data showed

Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves. Gold reserves increased by USD 824 million to USD 67.092 billion during the week, the RBI said.

The Special Drawing Rights were down by USD 58 million to USD 17.815 billion, the apex bank said. India's reserve position with the IMF was down by USD 18 million at USD 4.199 billion in the reporting week, the apex bank data showed. *—PTI*

DRIVEN BY PVT INVESTMENT

India's economy projected to grow 6.6% in 2025: UN

UNITED NATIONS, 10 JAN

The Indian economy is expected to grow by 6.6 per cent in 2025, driven by strong private consumption and investment, according to a United Nations report released on January 10. The "World Economic Situation and Prospects 2025" report highlights that South Asia's economic growth will largely hinge on India's robust performance, projecting regional growth at 5.7 per cent in 2025 and 6.0 per cent in 2026, buoyed also by recoveries in Bhutan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.

India's economy registered a growth of 6.8 per cent in 2024 and is set to return to this figure in 2026. The report describes private consumption and capital investments in infrastructure as key components of India's economic expansion, stating that these factors will have significant multiplier effects in the coming years.

Furthermore, the anticipated strong export growth in services—particularly in pharmaceuticals and electronics—is expected to further stimulate India's economy. The manufacturing and services sectors are forecasted to continue their expansion, underpinning sustained growth.

Favourable monsoon conditions in 2024 have enhanced agricultural prospects for 2025, lifting expectations for crop yields. The report notes strong investment growth in both East Asia and South Asia, spurred by domestic and foreign investments in new supply chains.

The anticipated strong export growth in services is expected to further stimulate India's economy **PHOTO: X**

- The report stresses the ongoing challenges facing employment in developing countries, while mentioning that India has maintained a robust labour market with the urban unemployment rate marginally unchanged at 6.6 per cent

Consumer price inflation in India is projected to decrease from an estimated 4.8 per cent in 2024 to 4.3 per cent in 2025, remaining within the Reserve Bank of India's prescribed target range. However, challenges remain, including high price spikes for essential goods due to adverse weather conditions.

Despite the positive outlook, the UN warns of potential risks to growth stemming from geopolitical tensions, external demand fluctuations, and climate-related disruptions. The report stresses the ongoing challenges facing employment in developing countries, while mentioning that India has maintained a robust labour market with the urban unemployment rate marginally unchanged at 6.6 per cent. *—PTI*

Dates announced for 38th National Football Games

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

The men's football tournament at the 38th National Games will be held from 30 January to 7 February, while the women's event will take place from 29 January to 6 February, the All India Football Federation (AIFF) announced on Friday. Matches will be played at the Indira Gandhi International Sports Complex and District Sports Complex in Haldwani, Uttarakhand, which is hosting the games. Both tournaments will feature eight teams each, including hosts Uttarakhand and the top teams from the 77th National Championship for Santosh Trophy 2023-24 and the 28th Senior Women's National Championship for Rajmata Jijabai Trophy 2023-24. The National Games will run from January 28 to February 14, marking Uttarakhand's debut as a host. *—PTI*

Former pacer Aaron retires from cricket

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

Injury-prone India pacer Varun Aaron announced his retirement from "representative cricket" after Jharkhand's campaign in the ongoing Vijay Hazare Trophy ended. The 35-year-old, who debuted internationally in 2011, played nine ODIs and as many Tests for India. He retired from red-ball cricket last year. Aaron shared the news on Instagram, saying, "For the past 20 years, I have lived, breathed, and thrived on the rush of bowling fast." He reflected on overcoming numerous career-threatening injuries, thanking the NCA physios, trainers, and coaches. He expressed gratitude for his career and now looks forward to enjoying life's smaller joys while remaining connected to the game he loves. *—PTI*

Boxer Lakshya Chahar advances in National C'ship

BAREILLY, 10 JAN

Defending champion Lakshya Chahar (80kg) defeated Railways' Sahil by a unanimous decision to advance to the second round of the senior men's National Championship in Bareilly. Chahar, who has represented India at the Asian Games and World and Asian Championships, delivered a dominant performance. Railways' Govind Sahani (60kg), a silver medalist at the 2023 Strandja Memorial International, continued his impressive form with a 5-0 victory over Gourav Mazumder of Assam. Punjab boxers also had a successful day, with Gopi winning in the flyweight (50kg) category, Jayshandeep Singh in bantamweight (55kg), Nikhil in lightweight (60kg), and Kanwarpreet Singh in super heavyweight (+90kg). The championship, organized by BFI, concludes on January 13, with SSCB as the favourite. *—PTI*

Mohammedan eyes break goalless run in Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 10 JAN

Mohammedan SC faces a tough challenge against Bengaluru FC on Saturday, aiming to break their five-game goalless run in the ISL. Bengaluru won the reverse fixture 2-1 and seeks a double over a Kolkata club for the first time since 2018-19. Currently second in the standings with 27 points from 14 matches, Bengaluru FC is five points behind Mohun Bagan Super Giant. Mohammedan SC, bottom of the table with just seven points, has been struggling to score, netting only five goals this season. However, they are on a positive run with two recent goalless draws. This match presents a battle between Bengaluru FC, aiming for the playoffs, and Mohammedan SC, desperate to end their slump. *—PTI*

Pratika & Tejal's 50s help India beat Ireland in 1st ODI

India's fielding let them down with several dropped catches

RAJKOT, 10 JAN

Tejal Hasabnis remained unbeaten on 53 from 46 balls, hitting nine boundaries *PHOTO: BCCI WOMEN*

India outclassed Ireland by six wickets in the first ODI of the three-match series, with Pratika Rawal and Tejal Hasabnis leading the chase. Rawal, anchoring the run chase of 239, scored a career-best 89 off 96 balls, hitting 10 fours and a six.

Hasabnis, marking her comeback after last playing an ODI in October, remained unbeaten on 53 from 46 balls, hitting nine boundaries. The duo added 116 runs for the fifth wicket, with India winning with 93 balls to spare.

India were off to a strong start, courtesy of stand-in skipper Smriti Mandhana's blistering 41 from 29 balls, including six fours and a six. Mandhana, who crossed 4,000 ODI runs in the process, powered India to a solid position before being dismissed in the powerplay. Rawal, in her third ODI, supported well, adding her third fifty-plus opening partnership in four matches.

However, India faced a brief setback when Maguire (3/57) dismissed Jemimah Rodrigues and Harleen Deol. The fall of three wickets for 46 runs, coupled with some disciplined bowling by Ireland, slowed India's progress. Yet, Hasabnis and Rawal's partnership ensured India stayed on track. Earlier, Ireland's Gaby Lewis top-scored with 92, guiding her team to 238/7 after being reduced to 56/4. Lewis and Leah Paul (59) shared a 117-run partnership, the first-ever century stand between the teams. India's fielding let them down, with several dropped catches and misfields, helping Ireland recover.

India's bowlers had a mixed performance, with Titas Sadhu and Priya Mishra taking key wickets. Sadhu removed Sarah Forbes (9), and Mishra dismissed Orla Prendergast (9). Despite early breakthroughs, Ireland's fightback was commendable, but India comfortably clinched the win. The victory sets up India nicely for the second ODI in the series.

'NO DELAY IN RENOVATION'

PCB rubbishes rumours of Pak not hosting CT

LAHORE, 10 JAN

Pakistan Cricket Board has rubbished speculations that the ICC Champions Trophy will be moved out of the country due to delayed construction work at three stadiums that will host the the event, starting 19 February.

The venues in Pakistan organising the tournament are Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium, Lahore's Gaddafi Stadium and Karachi's National Bank Stadium, while India will play all its matches in Dubai.

A PCB source said that the presence of a large International Cricket Council (ICC) delegation, including broadcast, hospitality and event operations officials, is an affirmation that the event is on schedule in Pakistan.

"The PCB has spent nearly PKR 12 billion to upgrade our stadiums to make them fitting for an event like the Champions Trophy, which was awarded to us," he said.

The source also said that an earlier statement about the stadium's work progress was also given out because of speculation in the media that the event would be moved out because of incomplete work at the venues.

The official added that a local reporter had, without permission, filmed the construction work at National Stadium Karachi and presented a negative picture. *—PTI*

Saim Ayub to not play in CT

Karachi, 10 Jan

Pakistan opener Saim Ayub's participation in the Champions Trophy is doubtful after specialists in London indicated his ankle injury may take over six weeks to heal. Ayub fractured his ankle while fielding in the second Test against South Africa earlier this month. The PCB consulted Dr. Lucky Jeyasaleen, who advised against rushing his return to cricket to prevent permanent damage.

Monfils reaches his 35th ATP final in Auckland

AUCKLAND, 10 JAN

Gael Monfils has etched his name into the record books by becoming the second oldest player since 1990 to reach a final on the men's elite tennis tour. The Frenchman, aged 38 years and 131 days, secured his spot with a hard-fought victory over American Nishesh Basavareddy, winning 7-6 (5), 6-4 in the semifinals at Auckland on Friday.

Monfils now trails only Ivo Karlovic, who reached the final in Pune, India, in 2019 at the age of 39 years and 311 days. Monfils surpasses Stan Wawrinka, who was 38 years and 124 days old when he reached the final in Umag, Croatia, in 2023. The top five older finalists in ATP history also include Karlovic, Roger Federer, and Rafael Nadal.

In a remarkable week, Monfils has continually broken records in Auckland. He became the oldest player in the professional era to reach the quarter-finals and later secured the title of oldest-ever semifinalist after defeating Facundo Diaz Acosta 6-3, 6-1. This final marks his 35th ATP Tour event. "Everybody knows I'm a warrior on the court; I don't give up easily," Monfils said after his semifinal. "I love defence, and my style reflects my strengths." He will face Belgium's Zizou Bergs on Saturday. *—PTI*

DISAPPOINTING F1 SEASON

Aston Martin replaces Krack as team principal

SILVERSTONE, 10 JAN

Aston Martin has replaced Mike Krack as team principal but is keeping him in a high-profile role at Formula 1 races after a disappointing 2024 season.

The team said Friday that Krack, who had been team principal since 2022, would move to a new role as Chief Trackside Officer focusing on "getting the most performance out of the car at the racetrack".

Chief executive Andy Cowell — who led Mercedes' engine program during its run of titles in the 2010s — will now double up as team principal. Cowell joined the team last year and became chief executive in October. Krack's trackside team will report to Cowell, and so will the staff at Aston Martin's headquarters in England.

Aston Martin said the change was made to ensure "clarity of leadership and as part of a shift to a flatter structure."

Aston Martin was fifth in the constructors' standings in 2024, the same position as in 2023. However, with Aston Martin aiming to become a title-winning team in future, the season was widely seen as a step backward as it lost ground to better-performing rivals like McLaren and Ferrari. *—PTI*

NEERAJ NAMED WORLD'S BEST JAVELIN THROWER

NEW DELHI, 10 JAN

India's Neeraj Chopra, who clinched silver at the Paris Olympics, has been named the best male javelin thrower in the world for 2024 by the esteemed American magazine Track and Field News. The accolade sees the 27-year-old surpass two-time world champion Anderson Peters of Grenada in the magazine's latest rankings.

Chopra, who narrowly lost the Olympic gold to Pakistan's Arshad Nadeem in August last year, recorded a throw of 89.45m, while Nadeem threw a massive 92.97m to secure the top Olympic spot. Nadeem's performance in 2024 saw him placed fifth in the rankings due to limited participation, competing in just one event and finishing fourth in the Paris Diamond League.

Track and Field News, established in 1948 and heralded as the "Bible of the Sport," annually compiles rankings that are highly regarded in the athletics community. Chopra previously topped the men's javelin throw rankings in 2023. Despite not winning any Diamond League events in 2024, Chopra secured second-place finishes in Doha, Lausanne, and Brussels, with his only significant triumph being the Paavo Nurmi Games in Turku, Finland. *—PTI*

Neeraj Chopra *PHOTO: PTI*

HINDI NOT NAT'L, BUT OFFICIAL LANGUAGE: ASHWIN

CHENNAI, 10 JAN

Former cricketer R Ashwin has asserted that Hindi is not the national language of India but merely an official language. His remarks came during a convocation ceremony at a private college near Chennai, where he engaged with students about their language preferences for his address.

While several students opted for English, there was significant enthusiasm when he offered to speak in Tamil. In contrast, there was a notable lack of interest when he mentioned Hindi. "Hindi – no response. I thought I would point out that it is not our national language, but an official language," commented the former Indian all-rounder. *—PTI*

Satwik-Chirag enter Malaysia Open SF

KUALA LUMPUR, 10 JAN

Star Indian men's doubles pair Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty advanced to the semifinals of the Malaysia Open with a gritty victory here on Friday.

The seventh-seeded Indians battled for 49 minutes to secure a 26-24, 21-15 win over the Malaysian duo of Yew Sin Ong and Ee Yi Teo in the quarterfinals of the prestigious Super 1000 tournament.

Satwik and Chirag, runners-up in the previous edition, will face South Korea's Won Ho Kim and Seung Jae Seo in the semifinals.

The opening game was a nail-biter, with both pairs keeping the contest evenly poised.

The Indians held a narrow 11-9 lead at the interval and extended it to 18-16, but the Malaysians rallied, earning three consecutive points to level at 19-19 and even snatched a 20-19 lead.

Undeterred, Satwik and Chirag displayed remarkable composure, saving four consecutive game points before closing the first game 26-24.

In the second game, the Malaysian pair started strong, leading for most of the game up to the interval with an 11-8 advantage.

However, Satwik and Chirag staged an incredible comeback, winning 13 of the next 17 points to seal the match and book their third consecutive semifinal berth. *—PTI*

Satwik and Chirag displayed remarkable composure *PHOTO: X*

FOES TURN FRIENDS

Murray to team up with Djokovic as coach for Aus Open

The partnership between long-time rivals Novak Djokovic and Andy Murray took the tennis world by surprise *PHOTO: X*

MELBOURNE, 10 JAN

In a surprising twist in the world of tennis, long-time rivals Novak Djokovic and Andy Murray have joined forces, with Murray stepping in as Djokovic's coach for the upcoming Australian Open. The two greats, who have known each other for 25 years and faced off 36 times as professionals, are now sharing insights on and off the court.

Djokovic expressed his excitement about the collaboration, noting, "At the beginning, it was a bit of a strange feeling to be able to share the insights with him... Now all cards are open on the table." This partnership, which took the tennis world by surprise when Djokovic approached Murray in November, is akin to Lionel Messi coaching Cristiano Ronaldo, as described by 2021 US Open champion Daniil Medvedev.

Both men, now 37 and born a week apart, have a rich history, with Djokovic leading their professional rivalry 25-11. Murray, a three-time Grand Slam champion, has often fallen short against Djokovic in pivotal matches, including four Australian Open finals.

Murray, whose last competitive match was at the Paris Olympics in August, admitted he was shocked when Djokovic contacted him: "I was obviously not expecting that when he called."

The partnership will be tested in Melbourne, but the future remains uncertain as to whether they will continue beyond the tournament. Djokovic highlighted the importance of having a coach who understands the rigours of winning Grand Slams, stating, "Andy just finished his playing career six months ago... I think his tennis IQ is very high." *—PTI*

DJOKOVIC CLAIMS HE WAS 'POISONED' DURING 2022 AUS OPEN

MELBOURNE, 10 JAN

Novak Djokovic has opted not to delve into his recent comments about health issues he experienced during his detention in Australia in 2022, preferring to focus on his upcoming Australian Open campaign. In a GQ magazine interview, Djokovic mentioned how he suffered from elevated levels of heavy metals in his blood after being served food while detained prior to his deportation from Australia.

"I would appreciate not talking more in detail about that, as I would like to focus on the tennis and why I'm here," Djokovic stated before the start of the tournament, which kicks off on Sunday (Saturday, EST). As he aims to become the first player to secure 25 Grand Slam singles titles, Djokovic is working with Andy Murray as his coach. In the lengthy GQ piece, Djokovic revealed, "I had some health issues. And I realised that in that hotel in Melbourne, I was fed with some food that poisoned me. ... I had a really high level of heavy metal. Heavy metal. I had ... very high levels of lead and mercury." When questioned about any evidence linking his blood metal levels to the food he consumed, the 37-year-old Serbian did not provide a direct answer at the conclusion of his news conference. *—PTI*